ROSES

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FOUR ONE-ACT PLAYS

STREAKS OF LIGHT—THE LAST VISIT
—MARGOT—THE FAR-AWAY PRINCESS

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

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STREAKS OF LIGHT

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

JULIA.

PIERRE.

WITTICH.

THE PRESENT DAY

The action takes place at a small pavilion situated in the park belonging to an old castle.

STREAKS OF LIGHT

An octagonal pavilion of the Rococo period, the three front walls of which are cut off by the proscenium. Ceiling and walls are cracked and spotted by rain, and bear the marks of long disuse. At the back, in the centre, a large doorway. The glass door is thrown wide open; the shutters behind are closed. On the right and left, in the oblique walls of the room, are windows, the shutters of which are also closed. Through the blinds at the door and the right window, sunbeams in streaks of light penetrate the semi-darkness of the room.

On the left, in the foreground, a Louis Sixteenth sofa with table and gilded chairs to match. On the wall above, an old mirror. Near the sofa, a tapestried doorway. A chandelier wrapped in a dusty gauze covering is suspended from the ceiling. A four-post bed with hangings of light net takes up the right side of the stage. In the foreground, in front of the bed, a table with plates, glasses, wine-decanters, and provisions on it. A coffee percolator stands under the table. In the middle of the stage, a little to the right, a chaise-longue. At the head of it, a small table. Between the large door and the windows, dusty marble busts on dilapi-

dated pedestals. Above them, on the walls, a collection of various sorts of weapons. The Oriental rugs which are thrown about the floor and over the chaise-longue contrast strangely with the faded splendour of the past.

The whole room is decorated with roses. On the table at the left is a bronze vessel of antique design overflowing with roses. Garlands of roses hang from the chandelier and encircle the bedposts. On the small table near the chaise-longue, a large, flat dish, also filled with roses. In fact wherever there is any place for these flowers, they have been used in profusion.

Part of the table which stands in front of the sofa is covered by a napkin, upon which are seen a bottle of wine and the remains of a luncheon for one. It is a sultry afternoon in midsummer.

JULIA *lies on the chaise-longue, asleep. She is a beautiful woman, about twenty-five years of age, intractable and passionate, with traces of a bourgeois desire to be "romantic." She is dressed in white, flowing draperies, fantastically arranged.*

A tower clock strikes four. Then the bells of the castle are heard ringing. Both seem to be at a distance of about two hundred paces.

PIERRE *enters cautiously through the tapestried doorway at the left. He is a fashionably dressed, aristocratic young fellow who has been petted and spoiled. He is effeminate,*

cowardly, arrogant, and is trying to play the passionate man, although inwardly cold and nervous.

JULIA.

(*Laughs in her sleep. Her laughter dies out in groans.*) Pierre! Pierre! Help! Pierre!

PIERRE (*bending over her*).

Yes, yes. What is it?

JULIA.

Nothing— (*Laughs and goes on sleeping*).

PIERRE (*straightening up*).

Whew! How hot it is! (*He stares at* JULIA, *his face distorted by fear and anger, and beats his forehead. Then indicating the outstretched form of the woman.*) Beautiful! —You beautiful animal—you! (*Kneels.* JULIA *holds out her arms to him, but he evades her embrace.*) Stop! Wake up!

JULIA (*tearfully*).

Please let me sleep.

PIERRE.

No! Wake up! I've only come for a moment. It's tea-time, and I have to go back to the house.

JULIA.

Please stay!

PIERRE.

No, mamma will be asking for me. I have to be there for tea.

JULIA (*pettishly*).

I have a headache. I want some black coffee!

PIERRE.

Then make it yourself. The gardener is cleaning the orchid rooms in the hot-house, and he has no time for you now.

JULIA.

He never has time for me!—And the meals that his wife cooks are simply abominable!—And the wine is always warm!—Do, for mercy's sake, steal the key to the ice-house!

PIERRE.

But you know that I can't!—I always bring you all the ice that I can manage to take from the table. If I insist upon having the key, the housekeeper will tell mamma.

JULIA.

But I won't drink warm wine—so there! That's what gives me these headaches.

PIERRE.

Your headaches, I want to tell you, come from the roses. Ugh!—this nasty smell from the withered ones—sour—

like stale tobacco smoke—why, it burns the brains out of one's head!

JULIA.

See here, dearie, you let the roses alone! That was our agreement, you know—basketsful, every morning! I wish the gardener would bring even more! That's what he's bribed for.—More! More! Always more!

PIERRE.

See here, if you were only reasonable——

JULIA.

But I'm not reasonable! O you—you— (*She holds out her arms to him. He comes to her. They kiss.*) More!—More!—No end!—Ah, to die!——

PIERRE (*freeing himself*).

Oh!

JULIA.

To die!

PIERRE (*with hidden scorn*).

Yes—to die. (*Yawning nervously.*) Pardon me!—It's as hot as an oven in here.

JULIA.

And the shutters are always closed! For eight long days I've seen nothing of the sun except these streaks of light. Do open the shutters—just once!

PIERRE.

For Heaven's sake!

JULIA.

Just for a second!

PIERRE.

But don't you realize that the pavilion is locked and that not a soul ever crosses the threshold?

JULIA.

Oh, yes, I know—because your lovely, reckless great-grandmother lost her life here a hundred years ago! That's one of those old-wives' tales that everyone knows.—Who can tell? Perhaps my fate will be the same as hers.—But do open the shutters!

PIERRE.

Do be reasonable! You know that in order to come in here by the side door without being seen I have to crawl through the woods for a hundred yards. The same performance twice a day—for a week! Now, if I should open the shutters and one of the gardener's men should see it, why, he'd come, and then——

JULIA.

Let him come! I'll smile at him—and he's no man if he doesn't keep quiet after that! Why, your old gardener would cut his hand off for me any day of his life—just for a bit of wheedling!—It can't be helped—they all love me!

PIERRE (*aside*).

Beast!

JULIA.

What were you muttering then? (PIERRE *throws himself down before her and weeps.*) Pierre! Crying?—Oh!—Please don't—or I'll cry too. And my head aches so!

PIERRE (*softly but nervously and with hatred*).

Do you know what I'd like to do? Strangle you!

JULIA.

Ha! Ha! Ha!—(*pityingly*) Dear me! Those soft fingers—so weak!—My little boy has read in a naughty book that people strangle their loves—and so he wants to do some strangling too!

PIERRE (*rising*).

Well, what's to become of you? How much longer is the game to last in this pavilion?

JULIA.

As long as the roses bloom—that was agreed, you know.

PIERRE.

And then?

JULIA.

Bah! Then!—Why think of it? I'm here now, here under the protection of your lovely, ghostly great-grandmother. No one suspects—no one dreams! My husband

is searching for me the whole world over!—That was a clever notion of mine—writing him from Brussels—Nora, last act, last scene—and then coming straight back again! I'll wager he's in Paris now, sitting at the Café des Anglais, and looking up and down the street—now toward the Place de l'Opéra, now toward the Madeleine. Will you wager? I'll go you anything you say. Well, go on, wager!

PIERRE.

On anything else you wish—but not on that!

JULIA.

Why not?

PIERRE.

Because your husband was at the castle this morning.

JULIA (*rising hastily*).

My husband—was—at the castle——?

PIERRE.

What's so surprising about that? He always used to come, you know—our nearest neighbour—and all that sort of thing.

JULIA.

Did he have a reason for coming?

PIERRE.

A special reason?—No.

JULIA.

Pierre—you're concealing something from me!

PIERRE (*hesitating*).

Nothing—that I know of. No.

JULIA.

Why didn't you come at once? And now—why have you waited to tell me?

PIERRE (*sullenly*).

You're hearing it soon enough.

JULIA.

Pierre, what happened? Tell me, exactly!

PIERRE.

Well, he came in the little runabout—without a groom—and asked for mamma. I naturally pretended to be going out. But you know how she always insists on my staying with her.

JULIA.

And how was he—was he just the same as ever?

PIERRE.

Oh, no, I wouldn't say that.

JULIA.

How did he look? Tell me, tell me!

PIERRE.

In the first place, he wore black gloves—like a grave-digger.

JULIA.

Ha! Ha! And what else?

PIERRE.

In the second place, he was everlastingly twitching his legs.

JULIA.

And what else? What else?

PIERRE.

Oh, he explained that you were at a Hungarian watering-place, that you were improving, and that you were expected home soon. (JULIA *bursts out laughing.*) Yes, (*gloomily*) it's screamingly funny, isn't it.

JULIA.

So I'm at a Hungarian watering-place! Ha! Ha! Ha!

PIERRE.

But he looked at me so questioningly, so—so mournfully—why, it was really most annoying the way he looked at me.

JULIA.

At a Hungarian watering-place!

PIERRE.

And then, later, mamma said to him, "It's a dreadful pity your dear wife isn't here just now. She does so love the roses."

JULIA.

And what did he say?

PIERRE.

"Our roses are not thriving very well this year," said he.

JULIA.

But his turnips!—They always thrive!—And then——?

PIERRE.

Then a strange thing occurred that I can't help worrying about. Suddenly mamma said to him, "Something very peculiar is happening on our estate this year. Now I can see from where I sit that the whole place is one mass of roses. And yet, if at any time I ask for a few more than usual, there are none to be had!"

JULIA.

Why, you must have been shaking in your boots! Did you do anything to betray us?

PIERRE.

Oh, I think I know how to take care of myself!—But suddenly he grew absolutely rigid—as if—as if he had been

reflecting. He acted like a man who sleeps with his eyes open. Mamma asked him a question three times, and he never answered a word!

JULIA.

I say, did you come here to frighten me?

PIERRE (*bursting out*).

What is your fear compared to what I had to stand! Compared to my biting, nauseous shame as I sat there opposite him?—I scorned the man inwardly, and yet I felt as if I ought to lick the dust on his boots. When mamma said to him, "You don't look very well, Herr Wittich—are you ill?"—her words were like the box on the ear that she gave me when, as a lad of fifteen, I got into mischief with the steward's daughter.—Why did you drag me into this loathsome business? I don't like it!—I won't stand it!—I like to feel straight! I want my hands clean!—I want to look down on the people that I meet!—I owe that to myself.

JULIA.

Reproaches?—I'd like to know who has the guilty conscience in this case, you or I?

PIERRE.

How long have you been concerned about your conscience?

JULIA.

Pierre, you know I had never belonged to any other man —except him.

PIERRE.

But you've showered sweet glances right and left. You've flirted with every man who would look at you—even the stable-boy wasn't beneath your notice!

JULIA.

And he was better than you!—For he wanted nothing more than to follow me with his eyes. But you, Pierre, you were not so easily satisfied. No, the young Count was more exacting. Corrupt to the core—in spite of his twenty years——

PIERRE (*proudly*).

I am not a bit corrupt. I am a dreamer. My twenty years excuse that!

JULIA.

But your dreams are poisonous. You want a woman to be your mistress and yet be chaste—to keep the blush of maidenhood and yet be as passionate as yourself.—And what have you learned from your experience in the world? Nothing, except how to scent and track out the sins that lie hidden in one's inmost soul, the secret sins that one dares not admit to oneself.—And when the prey is in reach, then you fire away with your "rights of the modern

woman," your "sovereignty of the freed individuality"—and whatever the rest of the phrases may be.—Ah! You knew better than I that we all have the Scarlet Woman's blood in our veins!—Blow away the halo—and the saint is gone!

PIERRE.

It seems to me you found a great deal of pleasure in your sin!

JULIA.

Yes—at least that's what one tells oneself—perhaps one feels it, too.—It depends—more in the evening than the morning—more in March than October.—But the dread, the horror of it, is always there.—The weight of such love is like the weight of one's own coffin-lid.—And you soon discovered that, Pierre.—Then you began softly, gently, to bind me to you with glances and caresses that were like chains of roses!—Yes, and that I become maddened by roses as cats by valerian, that, too, you soon found out.—Then—then you began to speak to me of the lover's pavilion—all covered with roses—where your ancestors spent happy, pastoral hours in wooing their loves—the pavilion that had been waiting so long for a new mistress. You spoke of adorning it with beautiful hangings—of filling it full of roses. Oh you, you Pierre, how well you understood!—Do have some black coffee made for me! If the gardener can't do it, make it yourself! Please, please!

PIERRE.

But, I tell you, I have to go back to mamma.

JULIA.

Nowadays, you always "have to go back to mamma." Shall I tell you something—a big secret? You are tired of me! You want to get rid of me—only you don't know how!

PIERRE.

Your notions are offensive, my dear.

JULIA.

Pierre, I know my fate. I know I am doomed to the gutter. But not yet! Don't leave me yet! Care for me a little while longer—so the fall won't be too sudden.—Let me stay here as long as the roses bloom—here, where *he* can't find me! Oh, if I leave this place I shall die of fear!—Nowhere else am I safe from those two great fists of his!—Pierre, Pierre, you don't know his fists—they're like two iron bolts!—You, too—beware of him!

PIERRE (*half to himself*).

Why do you say that to me?

JULIA.

He was always jealous of you. When you sent the hothouse roses in April, he became suspicious. Ever since then, he has continually had the notion of an admirer in

his head. That was the danger-signal! Pierre, if he surmised—then you would be the first—and I would come afterward! Pierre, if you drive me to desperation, I'll give you up to him!——

PIERRE.

Are you mad?

JULIA.

I'll write him a letter something like this: "If you want to find the traces of my flight, search the rubbish heap behind the lover's pavilion. Search for the faded petals of the roses upon which, night after night, Pierre and I celebrated our union. Search the highway for the bloody prints of my bare feet after he turned me out. Then search the dregs of the brothels where I found a refuge. And then—then avenge me!"

PIERRE.

You'll do nothing of the kind, you— (*Seizes her by the wrists.*)

JULIA (*laughing*).

Nonsense! You have no strength! (*Disengages herself without difficulty.*)

PIERRE.

You've taken it out of me, you beast!

JULIA.

Beast?—You've been muttering that word now for a couple of days. This is the first time that you have flung

it in my face.—What have I done that was bestial except to throw my young life at your feet?—And so this is the end of our rose-fête?——

PIERRE (*in a low voice, breathing with difficulty*).

No, not yet—the end is still to come!

JULIA.

I dare say.

PIERRE.

In fact—you must—leave here.

JULIA.

I dare say.

PIERRE.

Do you understand?—You must leave this place—at once!

JULIA.

H'm—just so.

PIERRE.

For—you must know—you are no longer safe here.

JULIA (*turning pale*).

Not here either?—Not even here?——

PIERRE.

I didn't tell you everything, before.

JULIA.

Are you up to some new trick now?

PIERRE.

After I had accompanied him down the steps, he asked —very suddenly—to see the park.

JULIA.

The park——?

PIERRE.

Yes. And he seemed to be searching every rose-bush as if to count the number of blossoms that had been cut from it. Then—in the linden lane—I kept pushing to the left—he kept pushing to the right, straight for the pavilion. And as it stood before us——

JULIA (*terrified*)

The pavilion?

PIERRE.

Certainly.

JULIA (*shuddering*).

So near!

PIERRE.

He said he'd like to see the old thing once, from the inside.

JULIA.

Good heavens! But he knows that's impossible—he knows your family history!

PIERRE.

And you may be sure that's how I put it to him.

JULIA.

And what did he——?

PIERRE.

He was silent—and went back.

JULIA.

Went back! But he'll return!——

PIERRE.

You've dumped me into a pretty mess, you have!

JULIA.

Do, for goodness' sake, stop pitying yourself, and tell me what's to be done.

PIERRE.

Haven't I told you?

JULIA.

I'll not go away! I will not go away! He can't come in here! I will not leave this place!

PIERRE.

Listen! I'll have a carriage here—at one o'clock in the night—behind the park wall. Take it as far as the station.—Listen, I tell you!

JULIA.

No, no, no! As soon as I step into the street, I'm lost. And you, too! You don't know him! Gentle and tractable as he seems, when once he's angry, his blood boils over!—If I hadn't taken the cartridges out of his revolver in those days, he— Why, I've seen him pick up two unmanage-

able boys on our place and swing them over his shoulder into the mill stream! And they would have been ground to pieces, too, if he hadn't braced himself against the shaft. Pierre, Pierre, never get into his way again. He's merciless!

PIERRE (*feigning indifference*).

Oh, nonsense! I can hit the ace of hearts at twenty paces! I'll show him!

JULIA.

Yes, you'll "show him"! Do you suppose that he's going to wait until you take a shot at him?—Devilish much he cares about your duels! He'd make a clod of earth out of you before you'd have time to take off your hat!—I tell you, bolt the gate, lock every room in the house, hide behind your mother's chair,—and even there you won't be safe from him!

PIERRE.

(*Struggling against his growing apprehension.*) If that's the case, then—h'm, then the best thing for me to do is to disappear for a time.

JULIA (*trying to cling to him*).

Yes, let's go away together!

PIERRE (*moving aside*).

That might suit you.

JULIA.

But, after all, it would do no good. We could hide among crowds of people—in Piccadilly or in Batignolles—we could go to India or to Texas—and yet, if he took it into his head, he would find us none the less. Even if we should evade him—some day, sooner or later, you would have to return—and then—you would have to pay the penalty!

PIERRE (*stammering*).

I—would—have to——

JULIA (*wildly*).

So stay—stay here! Go and shoot him down!—at night—from behind!—It doesn't matter! Only—let—me—breathe—again.

PIERRE.

Do you want to drive me mad? Don't you see that I'm trembling all over?

JULIA.

Because you're a cad and a coward—because——

PIERRE.

Yes, yes—anything, for all I care! But go! Leave my property! Insult me, spit on me,—but go!

JULIA.

And what then? What then?

PIERRE.

Can't you write to him? Tell him that you have come back from your little journey—that you have reconsidered —that you can't live without him. Tell him to forget—and all shall be as it was before.—Now, wouldn't that be splendid?

JULIA.

Now when he suspects?—When he can follow me, step by step, here to this pavilion and back again? (*Contemptuously.*) Splendid!

PIERRE.

Then try something else!—Oh, now I have it! Now I have it!

JULIA.

Speak, Pierre, for God's sake, speak! I'll love you as—! Speak! Speak!

PIERRE.

You know him. His heart is soft?

JULIA.

Yes, except when he's in a rage, then——

PIERRE.

And you are sure that he loves you deeply?

JULIA.

If he didn't love me so much, what need we fear?

PIERRE.

Good! Well then, take a carriage at the station and drive home; throw yourself at his feet and tell him everything. Tell him, for all I care, that you hate me—that you loathe me—I don't mind—grovel before him until he raises you. And then all will be well!

JULIA.

Ah, if it were possible!—It would be deliverance—it would be heaven! I should be safe once more—a human being!—I should see the sun again, instead of these streaks of light!—I should breathe the fresh air, instead of this musty odour of dead roses!—I shouldn't have to sink down, down into the filth!—I shouldn't have to be a bad woman—even if I am one!—There would be a respectable divorce—or perhaps merely a separation. For, I no longer dare hope to live with him as his wife, even if I were satisfied to be no better than his dog for the rest of my days!—Ah, but it cannot be! It cannot be! You don't know him. You don't know what he's like when the veins stand out on his forehead!—He would kill me!—Rather than that—kill me yourself!—Here—now—this moment!—Get your duelling pistols. Or, no! There—there—there are plenty of weapons! (*She pulls at the weapons on the wall, several of which fall clattering upon the floor.*) Swords—daggers—here! (*Throws an armful on the chaise-longue.*) They are

rusty—but that doesn't matter.—Take one! Stab me first —then—do as you please!—Live if you can—do!—live as happily as you can! Your life is in your hands.

PIERRE.

Yes—I dare say. Live!—But how? Where? (*Sobs chokingly.*)

JULIA.

Come, then—we'll die together—together! (*They sink into each other's arms and remain motionless in mute despair. After a time,* JULIA *raises her head cautiously and looks about her.*) Pierre!

PIERRE (*troubled*).

Well?

JULIA.

Has it occurred to you? Perhaps it isn't so, after all!

PIERRE.

What do you mean?

JULIA.

Perhaps we've just been talking ourselves into this notion, little by little—think so?

PIERRE.

You mean that he really wanted to do nothing but—look at the pavilion?

JULIA.

Well, it's possible, you know.

PIERRE.

Yes—at least nothing very unusual occurred.

JULIA.

But your naughty, naughty conscience came and asserted itself. Ha! Ha! What a silly little boy it is! A downright stupid little boy!

PIERRE.

My imagination was always rather easily aroused. I——

JULIA (*laughing without restraint*).

Such a stupid boy!—Pierre, let's make some coffee—for a change, eh?

PIERRE.

But you know—I have to——

JULIA.

Dear me, mamma has had her tea long ago. Tell her you sat down in the shade—and fell asleep—anything! It's growing a bit shady here now. See there! The streaks of light have gone. (*Indicates a corner of the room in which the streaks of light have just grown dim.*) Ah! but how hot it is! (*Tears her dress open at the throat, breathing heavily.*) Will you bring me the coffee-pot, like a good boy?

PIERRE (*listlessly*).

Oh, well—all right. (*Carries the coffee-pot to the table.*)

JULIA.

Pierre, you—you couldn't open the small door just a tiny bit? No one would look into the shrubbery.

PIERRE.

Well, out there in the shrubbery, it's even hotter than in here.

JULIA.

Oh, just try it—won't you?

PIERRE.

Well, you'll see! (*Opens the door at the left.*)

JULIA.

Whew! It's like a blast from a furnace! And that disgusting odour—a mixture of perspiration and bad perfume —ugh!

PIERRE.

That's from the roses of our by-gone days—they lie out there in great heaps.

JULIA.

Close the door! Hurry—close it!

PIERRE (*does so*).

I told you how it would be!

JULIA.

Well, perhaps you could adjust the shutters at the large door so that we'd get more fresh air in here.

PIERRE.

Even that would be dangerous. If some one happened to be looking this way and saw the movement——

JULIA (*going to the door*).

One has to do it slowly, ve–ry slow–ly— (*She starts, uttering a low cry of fear, and retreats to the foreground, her arms outstretched as if she were warding off a ghost.*)

PIERRE.

What's the matter?

JULIA.

Sh! Sh! (*Approaches him cautiously, then softly.*) There's a man—out there.

PIERRE.

Where?

JULIA.

Hush!—Come here—you can see it against the light. (*They cautiously change places.* PIERRE *utters a low shriek, then* JULIA, *softly, despairingly*) Pierre!

PIERRE.

It must be the gardener.

JULIA.

It's not—the—gardener.

PIERRE.

Who is it then?

JULIA.

Creep around—and lock—the glass door.

PIERRE (*weak from fright*).

I can't.

JULIA.

Then I will. (*She has taken but a few steps toward the door when the streaks of light again become visible.*) He's gone now!

PIERRE.

How—gone?

JULIA.

There—there—nothing——

PIERRE.

Seize the opportunity—and go.

JULIA.

Where?

PIERRE.

To the gardener's house—quick—before he comes back.

JULIA.

In broad daylight—half dressed as I am?

PIERRE.

Throw on a wrap—anything—hurry! (*Knocking at the door on the left. They both stand rooted to the spot. The knocking is repeated. Then* PIERRE, *in a choking voice*) Come in.

(WITTICH *enters. He is a large, burly man of about forty, whose whole appearance betrays neglect; his sandy-coloured hair is pushed back from his forehead in damp strands; his beard is straggling and unkempt; his face is haggard and perspiring, his eyes lustreless. He staggers heavily in walking. He speaks in a stammering, hesitating voice; he gives the impression, in sum, of a man who is deathly ill, but is making an intense effort to hold himself together.*)

WITTICH.

I beg your pardon if I am disturbing you. (*Both stare at him without venturing to move.*)

PIERRE (*taking heart*).

Oh—p-p-please——

WITTICH.

I see you were about to make coffee. Really—I don't want to——

PIERRE (*stammering*).

P-p-please—th-there's no—hurry——

WITTICH.

Well, then we may as well—settle—our affair—first. (JULIA, *who has been standing quite still, panting, utters a low groan. At the sound of her voice,* WITTICH *catches his breath as if suffocating, then sinks into one of the chairs at the left and stares vacantly at the floor.*)

PIERRE (*edging up to* JULIA—*then softly*).

Can you understand this?

JULIA (*glancing back—aside to* PIERRE).

Keep near the weapons!

PIERRE (*as* WITTICH *moves*).

Hush!

WITTICH.

You must forgive me—I only wanted to—look after—my—wife. (*Breaks down again.*)

PIERRE (*aside to* JULIA).

Why, he's quite out of his mind!

JULIA.

Keep near the weapons!

WITTICH.

I don't care—to settle—this matter—by means of a—so-called—affair of honour. I'm a plain man. I only know about such things from hearsay. And any way—I don't see that they help—m-matters much. (*Breaks into tearless sobs.*)

PIERRE (*aside*).

He won't hurt us.

JULIA (*stammering*).

I simply—don't—understand it—at all!

PIERRE (*pointing to* WITTICH).

Try it! Go to him!

JULIA.

He's not a bit like himself.

PIERRE.

Go on! Go on!

JULIA.

(*Who has timidly approached her husband, but has drawn back at a movement of his, suddenly throws herself at his feet with great emotion.*) George! George!—I am guilty!—I have sinned before God and you!—I acknowledge my crime!—My life is in your hands!—Crush me—grind me to dust!—But God knows, I only obeyed a wretched impulse. My love for you has never left my heart.—My one desire is to die. Kill me!—Here!—Now!—But forgive me! Ah, forgive me!

WITTICH (*staring straight ahead*).

Yes, they always talk like that—in books, at least.

JULIA.

Forgive me!

WITTICH.

There is nothing to forgive. And I am not going to kill any one. What good would it do? (JULIA *sobs, hiding her face in her hands.*)

PIERRE.

Well, then—don't kneel there—like that—Julia, dear!

JULIA.

I shall lie here until he raises me. Raise me! Take me in your arms! Oh, George——

WITTICH.

Yes, that's what they always say. (*Sinks into reverie again.*)

PIERRE (*aside to her*).

Hush! Stand up! (*She does so.*) Well—h'm—I suppose I may assume, Herr Wittich, that you had some purpose in seeking this interview?

WITTICH.

Yes—yes. (*Looking about him.*) I can well imagine that my wife—er—that the lady must find it very pleasant here.

PIERRE.

Oh, yes—we needn't hesitate to say that, need we, Julia, dear?

JULIA (*uncertainly adopting his tone*).

No, indeed, Pierre, dear.

WITTICH.

At least—she seems to have plenty of roses here.

JULIA (*laughing nervously*).

Oh, yes—plenty.

WITTICH.

May I ask whether the lady has made any arrangements for the future?

JULIA (*still timidly*).

I was thinking of making my home in Paris, wasn't I, Pierre?

PIERRE.

Yes. You see, Julia wants to live a life suited to her tastes and inclinations—a life such as she cannot have even here—a life consecrated to Beauty and Art.

WITTICH.

They say that an existence of that sort comes high. Has my wife—er—has the lady made any provision for her expenses?

PIERRE (*embarrassed*).

From the moment that I become of age I shall be in a position to—h'm—h'm——

WITTICH.

I see. But *until* that moment—?

PIERRE.

I—er——

WITTICH.

Well, I consider it my duty—and mine alone—to protect the woman whom—until recently—I called my wife. And

to save her from ruin, I am willing to make any sacrifice whatsoever.

PIERRE.

Oh, as for that, of course——

WITTICH.

I don't intend to demand that you legitimize your relations.

PIERRE.

Very kind of you—really—very thoughtful indeed.

WITTICH.

Not for a moment that I don't dare to insist upon such an arrangement for my former wife, but because I want to guard her from lifelong misery.

PIERRE.

Really, you wouldn't believe how often we have discussed this question—would he, Julia, dear?

JULIA.

But I am never going to grant your wish, Pierre, dear. You shall keep your liberty—you shall be free! Even as I ask nothing better than to follow my own inclinations. If I am ruined because of them—well, it's no one's concern but my own—no one's! (*Tosses her head.*)

WITTICH.

May I inquire what those inclinations are?

JULIA.

It's hard to say—off-hand.—You must feel it—you must— Well, I want to be free!—I want to hold my fate in my own hands!—I want— Oh, why talk about it? What is one poor, human life?—especially a life like mine!—I am branded—doomed to the gutter!—One need use no ceremony with me now!

WITTICH.

Really! Well—h'm—if I had known that you felt that way about it—I should have made you—a different proposition—Julia, dear.

JULIA.

Tell me! Please!

PIERRE.

Yes—tell us—please!

WITTICH.

I suppose I may assume that the people at the castle know nothing of this little adventure of the young Count's?

PIERRE.

You may rest assured, my dear sir, that I know what is due a woman's honour.

WITTICH.

Ah—really!—Well, I'm sure no one saw me coming here. So then, there need be no scandal.

PIERRE.

That would certainly be most agreeable to all parties concerned.

WITTICH.

But—how did the lady propose to leave here without being seen?

PIERRE.

Pray, my dear sir, let that be my concern.

WITTICH.

That concern, however, I shall share with you—my dear sir. And it seems to me that the best plan would be for the lady to put on a decent dress, walk through the grounds with me, and pay a visit to the Countess at the castle.

PIERRE.

What!—my mother—? What's the use of that?

WITTICH.

It will look as if she'd returned—and we'd—somehow—met here.

PIERRE.

Do you think any one is going to believe that?

WITTICH (*proudly*).

What else should they believe?

JULIA (*frightened anew*).

Oh, but I don't want to! I don't want to do that! Pierre! I want to stay with you! I am under your protection, Pierre!

PIERRE.

See here, my dear sir, let us suppose that your plan is successful—what then?

JULIA.

Yes—yes—afterward—what then?

WITTICH.

Then?—Then— (*Looks from one to the other, uncertainly, almost imploringly, and breaks down again.*)

PIERRE.

Well—won't you go on with your proposition?

WITTICH.

Yes, I suppose that when a man has acted as I have acted here, he must have lost—his sense of pride—and honour—and all the rest of it—long ago.—Then nothing is left him but—his duty.—And the thing that seems to me my —duty—I am going to do.—Let the Count sneer at me—I no longer——

PIERRE.

Oh, please—I say!

WITTICH.

Well, then, let me tell you something, Julia. After I had read the letter from Brussels, I had two rooms prepared for you—in the left wing—quite apart; so that some day, in case—you ever—came back— Oh, well—it doesn't matter now. But the rooms—are—still there—and if you would like to come home with me now—straight off—well, you might be spared—some annoyance.

PIERRE.

H'm—so you're willing—? (*Shrugs his shoulders and laughs.*) I suppose that sort of thing is all a matter of taste—but I can understand——

WITTICH.

I am speaking to you, Julia.

JULIA.

Oh, I thank you most heartily, George. It's certainly very noble of you—and—I deeply appreciate it. But after —this, I should always feel ashamed before you—I should feel that I was just being tolerated—I— No. Thank you, George—but I can't accept it.

PIERRE (*correcting her*).

That is—! (*Aside to* JULIA.) Don't be a fool!

WITTICH (*without noticing* PIERRE).

You shall never hear a word of reproach from my lips, Julia, dear.

JULIA.

But—if I should actually accept—we never could go on as we did before, you know. I must be free to do exactly as I please—to go away—come back—just as I like. There is such a thing as the sovereignty of the individuality, my dear George—you can't deny that.

PIERRE.

Herr Wittich can't possibly deny that!

WITTICH.

You shall have your own way as far as it lies in my power, Julia, dear.

JULIA.

And then, you must try to bring a little more—more beauty into our life.—I surely have the right to demand that. Just look about you here. You know how passionately fond of roses I am. My soul demands something besides—potatoes! Well, I insist upon having roses around me. That's not unreasonable, is it?

WITTICH.

You shall have roses enough to smother you.

PIERRE (*nervously*).

Well, then, Julia, dear, I see no reason why we should not accept this proposition.

WITTICH.

What have you got to say about it?

PIERRE.

I beg your pardon, Herr Wittich. I certainly don't want to offend you. But—as Julia and I have found so much in each other—haven't we, Julia, dear?

JULIA.

Yes—so very, very much, Pierre, dear.—And to know that we were so near—and yet could never see each other or talk together, or— I, for my part, couldn't endure it, could you, Pierre?

PIERRE.

Oh—as for that—well, it would be hard, Julia, dear.

JULIA.

And what would the world say, dear George, if we should suddenly—and apparently without any cause—break off all communication with our neighbors? How would Pierre explain it to his mother? Why, he simply couldn't! No; if we are to carry out your plan, then every-

thing must remain outwardly the same as before. Don't you agree with me, Pierre, dear?

PIERRE.

(*Hesitating, with an apprehensive glance toward* WITTICH.) Outwardly—yes, Julia, dear.

WITTICH (*losing control of himself*).

So that's your condition, is it?

JULIA (*with a sort of nervous impudence*).

Yes, that's our condition—isn't it, Pierre, dear? (PIERRE *does not reply, but looks at* WITTICH.)

WITTICH.

Really?—Really!—Very well! (*He draws himself to his full height, his face flushes, and he looks around the room wildly, as if searching for something.*)

JULIA.

What are you looking for, George?

WITTICH.

If you— (*Gasps as if suffocating.*)

JULIA.

George! George! What's the matter?

WITTICH.

There—there—there! (*With a loud cry, he falls upon the weapons and snatches one of the daggers.*)

JULIA.

Help! Help! Pierre! Save me!

PIERRE (*at the same time*).

Help! Help! (*He pushes open the door and escapes, screaming.* JULIA *rushes out through the door at the left.* WITTICH *dashes after her. A piercing shriek is heard. After a short pause,* JULIA *appears at the large door in the centre. She tries to go further, fails, supports herself against the door posts for an instant, and then reels into the room. She attempts to lean against the small table in the centre, but falls to the floor, dying. As she falls the small table is upset, burying her beneath a shower of roses.*

Through the doorway at the left, WITTICH *is heard, sobbing and groaning. In the distance* PIERRE *is shouting for help. The sound of many voices, growing louder as the curtain falls.*)

II

MARGOT

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

HERR EBELING, a lawyer.
FRAU VON YBURG.
MARGOT, her daughter.
DOCTOR VON TIETZ.
BONATH, a secretary.
A SERVANT.

THE PRESENT DAY

The scene is laid in a large German city.

MARGOT

The richly furnished office of a prosperous lawyer. Pictures, bronzes, carved furniture, costly hangings. In the foreground, on the left, a window; turned toward it, a writing-table with a writing-chair behind. Near the window, a leather arm-chair. At the narrow side of the table, in the foreground, a low seat. On the right, a sofa, table, and chairs. In the background, a door which, when opened, reveals the clerks working at long tables. To the right, back, another door. The backward projection of the writing-table forms a revolving-stand for reference books. On the writing-table, among documents and writing materials, are photographs in standing frames and a slender vase filled with dark red roses.

It is winter, about six o'clock in the evening. The lamps are lighted.

EBELING *is seated in the writing-chair. He is a man of about forty, attractive, winning in manner, his clothes betokening wealth and refinement; he wears a short, dark beard, and his hair is slightly gray at the temples.* VON TIETZ, *sitting opposite him in the arm-chair, is about thirty, very smartly dressed—in appearance a type of the ordinary drawing-room devotee.*

EBELING (*holding out a box of cigars*).

There! Now let's chat. Will you smoke?

V. TIETZ (*helping himself*).

Really now—if I'm disturbing you——

EBELING.

See here, my dear fellow, if you were disturbing me, I'd make short work of you. But (*looking toward the clock*) my office hours are over. And we'll find out immediately what else there is. (*He rings.*)

BONATH *appears with a bundle of papers.*

EBELING.

Is any one still there?

BONATH.

No, Herr Ebeling, but a lady is expected.

EBELING.

Yes, I know. Well, let me have the papers. (BONATH *lays them before him.*)

EBELING.

(*To* V. TIETZ.) You can go on speaking. These are only signatures.—Have you a light?

V. TIETZ.

(*Who has stood up and is looking around the room.*) Yes, thank you.

EBELING.

See that this decision is delivered to Baron von Kanoldt at once.

BONATH.

Yes, Herr Ebeling.

V. TIETZ.

You've become a collector, I see.

EBELING (*signing*).

One must have some diversion.

V. TIETZ.

What's that? Looks like a Terburg. Is it an original?

EBELING (*signing*).

Would you expect it to be a copy?

V. TIETZ.

H'm, your practice is certainly splendid.

EBELING.

There are a lot of people, though, who think they are cleverer than I—and take great pains to justify their opinion. (*To* BONATH.) Will it be necessary to work overtime?

BONATH.

Not to-day, Herr Ebeling.

EBELING.

Then you can announce Frau von Yburg as soon as she comes. (v. TIETZ *listens attentively.*)

BONATH.

Very well, Herr Ebeling. (*Goes out.*)

v. TIETZ.

The lady you are expecting is Frau von Yburg?

EBELING.

Of course you know that I've been the Yburg's legal adviser for years.

v. TIETZ (*sitting down*).

Well, really, this is quite a marvellous coincidence. It's on account of the Yburgs that I've come to see you.

EBELING (*interested*).

Is that so? What's the matter?

v. TIETZ.

My dear friend, if you hadn't so completely drawn away from all society since your wife l— (*alarmed.*) I beg your pardon.

EBELING.

Go on! Say it! Left me! Walked out of the house! You may say it. But then—drop it! Even our old fraternity friendship doesn't oblige us to be everlastingly putting each other on the grill.

V. TIETZ.

No, really—it escaped me somehow. I'm awfully sorry.

EBELING.

Oh, well, never mind. You know, I speak of it quite disinterestedly. And it's a good many years since then. Only—I'd rather not be attacked unawares.

V. TIETZ.

Don't worry. I'll be on my guard. But—as we've mentioned it—there's something I wanted to ask you before—only I hadn't the courage. Tell me, do you always keep her picture on your table?

EBELING (*in a hard voice*).

Yes.

V. TIETZ.

Then you still love her?

EBELING.

No. I only keep the picture there to warn me against making a fool of myself again. So many charming women

sit there where you're sitting, women just on the point of divorce—and therefore in need of consolation. Every now and then one of them undertakes to faint—um—and then I have to— (*Holds out his arms.*)

v. TIETZ (*bursting out laughing*).

Aha! Very interesting! Very interesting!

EBELING.

In short, it does no harm to keep the picture there.

v. TIETZ.

Of course, everyone knows how much courted you are. For instance, no matter when I come to see you, I always find those beautiful roses on your table. They speak for themselves. Heavens! What a luxury! Roses in January!

EBELING.

Things like that come anonymously. If I knew who the sender was, I wouldn't accept them.

v. TIETZ.

Let me—with all due modesty—give you a piece of advice: you ought to marry.

EBELING.

(*Ironically, shaking his finger at him across the table.*) Thank you. But didn't you want to speak to me about the Yburgs?

v. TIETZ.

Yes. What was I going to say?—Oh, yes. Well, if you hadn't taken it into your head to live like a hermit, you'd know that, for some time past, I've been a very frequent visitor at the Yburgs's.

EBELING.

Oh, yes, I know. I go there myself sometimes—only not when other people are around.

v. TIETZ.

Well, then, to make a long story short—why should I mince matters with you?—I am courting Margot.

EBELING (*startled*).

Ah—you, too? You're also one of the crowd?

v. TIETZ (*conceitedly*).

I trust that I stand up a bit above the crowd.

EBELING.

Indeed? I thought perhaps the social glamour of the Yburgs was attracting you. A thing like that can't help dazzling one. But that you——

v. TIETZ.

Is it so surprising? That girl is so bewitching—so—so entirely unlike these forward, city-bred girls. With her,

at least, one knows what one can count on. She's so—so the essence of everything innocent and chaste and pure.

EBELING (*quoting*).

"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,"—thy dowry shall not escape me.

V. TIETZ.

No, no—don't joke. It's out of place. I won't deny that, as an official without fortune—that would also be very—h'm—but——

EBELING.

Yes, but what have I got to do with it?

V. TIETZ.

See here, my dear friend, we scattered remnants of the old college fraternity have grown so accustomed to ask your help in times of need, to look up to you as a sort of father confessor——

EBELING.

Do you want me to go and propose for you?

V. TIETZ.

We'll talk of that later. But first I'd like to ask you something. See here, what rôle is Baron von Kanoldt playing in this family?

EBELING.

So that's it!

V. TIETZ.

You're his counsel in his divorce proceedings, aren't you?

EBELING.

As the affair has become common talk, I need make no secret of it.

V. TIETZ.

They say that it is the wife who has been the martyr. And yet, after fifteen years, *he* begins the divorce proceedings. Why should he?

EBELING.

My dear fellow, you must put that question to some one who's not so well informed as I am.

V. TIETZ.

Oh, see here, I don't want to be indiscreet about it, but the further the case goes, the more persistent are the rumours that he has designs on Margot's hand—and, furthermore, that her mother is encouraging him!

EBELING.

Frau von Yburg will be here in a few minutes.—Ask her!

V. TIETZ.

What do you take me for?

EBELING (*shrugging his shoulders*).

Oh, well then——

V. TIETZ.

But just think! that man—forty, if he's a day, fat, worn out, a roué whose amorous adventures are common gossip to every cabby on the street!

EBELING.

Pardon me, my clients are all virtuous, young, handsome, desirable—of inestimable pulchritude.

V. TIETZ.

See here—are you chaffing me?

EBELING.

I'm only trying to make you understand that you've unwittingly walked into the enemy's camp.

V. TIETZ (*standing up*).

Very well—if you don't want to——

EBELING.

(*Also stands up, and puts his hand on* V. TIETZ'S *shoulder.*) My dear fellow, you're ten years younger than I. You're one of your country's young hopefuls. Go ahead and do what your heart and pocket-book bid you.

V. TIETZ.

I didn't need you to tell me that. (*A knock at the door.*)

EBELING.

Come in.

BONATH

Frau von Yburg and——

EBELING.

Ask her in.

(BONATH *stands aside, opening the door. Enter* FRAU V. YBURG *and* MARGOT. FRAU V. YBURG *is a woman of about forty, dressed simply but tastefully; her bearing is dignified, self-possessed, refined, and betrays a natural, unaffected knowledge of the demands of convention; but hidden behind her assurance, and scarcely noticeable, are the traces of an old sorrow, a helpless glance, and a forced smile.* MARGOT *is a lovely young girl, extremely well-bred, with a somewhat shy, reserved manner.*)

V. TIETZ (*at sight of* MARGOT).

Ah!

FRAU V. YBURG.

I brought my little girl along, Herr Ebeling, to let her catch a glimpse of the lion's den. I hope that you won't mind.

EBELING (*kissing her hand*).

A thousand times welcome, dear ladies. (*Shakes hands with* MARGOT.)

FRAU V. YBURG.

Good evening, Herr von Tietz. This is indeed a pleasure. (*Gives him her hand.*)

V. TIETZ

I'm very happy to meet you both—I hadn't hoped to see Fräulein von Yburg here. But our friend believes in military promptitude. I have just received permission to take my leave.

FRAU V. YBURG.

I hope that you will come to see us soon, Herr von Tietz.

V. TIETZ.

That's very kind of you. (*Bowing to Margot.*) Fräulein von Yburg!

EBELING (*accompanying him to the door*).

Good-bye, my dear fellow. No bad feelings now——

V. TIETZ.

Oh, I say! Of course not! (*Goes out.*)

EBELING.

Won't you sit down?

FRAU V. YBURG.

Oh, no. Margot is only going to glance around a bit. Yes, my little girl, you may well look about. Between these four walls many a fate has been shaped.

EBELING.

Let us rather say, has been mended.

MARGOT (*softly, suddenly looking up*).

Mine, too?

FRAU V. YBURG.

(*Looking at her with evident disapproval.*) Perhaps Margot may call for me again in half an hour. You won't mind?

EBELING.

It will give me great pleasure.

FRAU V. YBURG.

Then run away, dear, pay your visit, and let the carriage bring you back again. (*Sits down, right.*)

MARGOT.

(*Giving him her hand with social assurance, but a little timidly, none the less.*) Au revoir, Herr Ebeling.

EBELING.

Au revoir, Fräulein Margot. (*Accompanies her to the door, and calls.*) Bonath, see to it that Fräulein von Yburg finds her way out. She is coming back later.

Voice of BONATH.

Very well, Herr Ebeling.

(EBELING *bows to* MARGOT, *who is already out of sight, and closes the door.*)

EBELING.

Well, Frau von Yburg, we've brought matters to this point.

FRAU V. YBURG (*sighing*).

Yes.

EBELING.

The divorce was granted yesterday morning.

FRAU V. YBURG.

Yes, I know.

EBELING.

Well, aren't you pleased?

FRAU V. YBURG.

My dear Herr Ebeling, my heart is so full of gratitude—really, I don't know how to thank you—for myself and also for my poor, dear child. But I'm so helpless—so perplexed—I really don't know—I——

EBELING.

Why, what can be wrong?

FRAU V. YBURG.

Yes—just fancy—well, then—*she won't do it!*

EBELING (*astonished*).

What's that?

FRAU V. YBURG.

Think of the monstrosity of it! She won't do it.

EBELING.

Has she been notified that the divorce has been granted?

FRAU V. YBURG.

Yesterday—just after the proceedings—Baron von Kanoldt—came—with his proposal.

EBELING.

H'm!—quicker than I had expected.

FRAU V. YBURG.

My husband, of course, was simply thunderstruck. One can surely sympathise with him—von Kanoldt—a man in the forties—divorced—with grown children—and *such* a reputation! But when he saw that I took the man's part—I had to do that, didn't I?

EBELING.

That was our only course.

FRAU V. YBURG.

Then his position, his wealth, his connections at court—oh, yes, and naturally our long friendship— Of course, my husband doesn't surmise what this man did to her! In the end, he agreed that Margot herself should decide.

EBELING.

Well, and—? What——?

FRAU V. YBURG.

She came, looked him quietly in the face, and asked for time to think it over.

EBELING.

It seems to me your husband was very clever. Otherwise, he might perhaps have——

FRAU V. YBURG.

Yes, but when we were alone, just fancy! she declared quite simply: "No, I won't do it." I exclaimed, "Why, my dear child, you're out of your mind! You know that we've done everything for the sake of this day!" "Yes, I know all about it—but I won't." "You've been wishing it for three years," I said to her. And what do you suppose she answered! "I never wished it. You talked it into me—and he."

EBELING.

"He?" Pardon me, who?

FRAU V. YBURG.

You, Herr Ebeling.

EBELING (*standing up in his excitement*).

My dear lady, it was my duty to carry out what you and Fräulein Margot desired—and what, in short, the circumstances demanded.

FRAU V. YBURG.

Oh, I know! My God, how well I realise it! And what a task you've accomplished! No—when I remember how much persuasion, how much subtle reasoning, how much — Ah, and how I've suffered these three years! See, my hair is quite gray!—And I still can't understand it! I still look upon the girl as if she were a stranger, a mysterious being who has lost her way and accidentally come to me. I—I who was brought up so strictly, watched, and carefully tended all my life, kept worlds away from any taint of the unconventional— And she, too— No, on that point, I can't reproach myself. And yet—this horror! No, I shall never, never understand it! Ah, and to have to bear it all alone! Oh, yes, I had to do that. My husband, with his long army training, would have forced him to fight—and then we should all have been dragged in the dust. Margot's life—our position in society—everything! Ah, if you hadn't been here, Herr Ebeling! Do you remember how I came to you? I think I was half dead from wretchedness! With the letter to him in my hand, the letter that I had taken from her as she lay distracted in my arms! Do you remember?

EBELING.

Oh, don't speak of it! As I read that handwriting—still so childish—and that helpless, stammering question:

"What has happened to me?"—God knows, everything turned black before my eyes! Oh! it's too horrible!

FRAU V. YBURG.

And then you yourself said to me, "You're right—the blackguard *must*. I'll make him."

EBELING.

I said it in the heat of the first great indignation. Please take that into consideration. After I went to work, I religiously kept to my programme to leave all threats and violence out of the question. Not only because the way I'm constituted that sort of fighting would be impossible, but also because I had to keep in mind that a new life—I don't venture to say a happy one—was to be gained through me. To-day, every one is grateful to me—even the one who at first opposed me most violently—that poor, wretched wife.

FRAU V. YBURG.

And now everything would have been forgiven. I can't understand it. I don't know—I——

EBELING.

So she won't do it?

FRAU V. YBURG.

And that's why I've fled to you in my need! Later, when she returns, I want to have gone. You understand?

I've arranged it this way so that you could bring her to her senses. A little heart to heart talk, you know. But if your influence doesn't help, then I don't know—then——

EBELING (*walking up and down*).

And so she won't do it.

FRAU V. YBURG.

Yes, just explain it to me! The only possible way in which to rehabilitate herself in her own eyes! And she throws it to the winds! What can she be thinking of? What——

EBELING.

And so she won't do it!

FRAU V. YBURG.

What's come over you, Herr Ebeling? You're not listening!

EBELING (*firmly, quietly*).

Very well, then she *shall* not.

FRAU V. YBURG.

For God's sake! You, too! You, too, want——

EBELING.

My dear friend, I have done all that lay in my power, often against my own convictions, I can assure you. She knows what she is doing. She will not. Very well. I'm

not here to bait her to her ruin. I am very sorry, but this time I must refuse my assistance.

FRAU V. YBURG.

But what will happen? Must all our work count for nothing—your work, my work? For I have worked over her with all my powers, I need not hesitate to say it, worked to place her again on those spiritual heights where a young girl of family by right belongs. I have led her back to Religion, for whoever has anything to expiate must possess Religion. I have read with her only the most carefully selected books, books that could never, never endanger a young girl's imagination. And I have taken special care to see to it that when she was in the company of young people, she should, if possible, be stricter and even more reserved than the most timid of her friends. For her need of such behaviour was double theirs, wasn't it? And you yourself will admit that my efforts have been successful. No one could deny it and look into those clear, steadfast eyes of hers. (EBELING *nods assent.*) She has become all soul—all——

EBELING (*doubtingly, sadly*).

Ah!

FRAU V. YBURG.

Yes, indeed, Herr Ebeling. No clandestine, no unseemly wish finds its way into her heart. I'll vouch for

that. She glides through life like a silent spirit, cleansed and purified.

EBELING.

And therefore we are to throw her into the jaws of that beast.

FRAU V. YBURG.

Is there any other way? Do you know of any?

EBELING (*tormented*).

H'm! She certainly has suitors enough!

FRAU V. YBURG.

She'll reject them all—as she has heretofore. She simply says, "I shall not begin my new life with a lie. I think too much of myself for that. And to confess, to tell the man, and have him turn his back on me, or out of pure pity raise me to his own level—I think *entirely* too much of myself for that."

EBELING.

I believe one can readily appreciate her feelings.

FRAU V. YBURG.

But what will become of her? Is she to wither and wear away—this heavenly young creature? (EBELING *walks about, growing more and more excited. A pause.*) Herr Ebeling, speak! Advise me!

EBELING (*firmly*).

I know of only one solution: she must choose some one who knows it.

FRAU V. YBURG.

Who could that be—except——?

EBELING (*breathing heavily*).

Except that man, there is only one other.

FRAU V. YBURG.

(*Stares at him uncomprehendingly with her hands clasped, then stammering.*) Oh!—oh, God! What a joy that would be!

EBELING.

What more can I say? Such things come and grow great in a man, one knows not how. She bore *her* sorrow, *her* shame, I mine. At first, perhaps, it was no more than a casual fancy—no, an interest, for my inclinations were always involved—but to-day it has become a passion, a passion that, lonely man as I am, gnaws me to the very core of my being.

FRAU V. YBURG.

But how have you managed through it all to keep so quiet, so deliberate, so——?

EBELING.

One learns, little by little, to be master of oneself. And five minutes ago there was absolutely no hope, (*bursting*

out) but if she no longer wants him—why shouldn't I—oh! (*Hides his face in his hand, trembling with emotion.*)

FRAU V. YBURG.

Wait! I don't see, after you've led him on to this point, how you'll ever justify all this to Baron von Kanoldt.

EBELING.

I don't know! Until now, I've led a tolerably respectable life. For, in the disgrace that *she* (*pointing to the picture of his wife*) brought upon me, I played no part.

FRAU V. YBURG.

Oh, yes, everyone in society knows that.

EBELING.

But I haven't once asked myself whether what I am now going to do—or should like to do—conforms to the prevailing standards of propriety. One would have to keep it secret, to let some time elapse—in short, I don't know! All I can say is that if she doesn't want him, if she won't take that—(*checking himself*)—him, well, then, the path is open to any one—to me as well as to another.

FRAU V. YBURG (*hesitating*).

I feel that I ought to warn you of just one thing more. She has never seemed to consider you as anything more than a fatherly sort of friend.

EBELING.

H'm! (*Laughs bitterly.*) Even though I'm a couple of years younger than——, I've certainly acted more like a father to her. But you're probably right. (*Knocking.*) Come in. (BONATH *enters.*)

BONATH.

I've let the clerks go home. Have you any further orders, Herr Ebeling?

EBELING.

You can go, too, Bonath. But tell my man to answer the door.

BONATH.

Very well, Herr Ebeling. Good evening. (BONATH *goes out.*)

EBELING.

Frau von Yburg, your daughter will return in a few minutes. Meanwhile, the scene has changed not altogether insignificantly. Do you still approve of that little private heart to heart talk—or not?

FRAU V. YBURG.

Ah, my dear friend, I have such boundless confidence in you. You've been her good angel for so long. I don't hesitate for a moment to leave her in your hands. And you'll carefully observe all the conventions? Of course you will.

EBELING.

But what can I say to her?

FRAU V. YBURG.

You're so skilled in reading the heart. You'll have found a way to make her confess something before she's aware of it. Only let me beg of you—if you find nothing in what she says that gives you reason to hope, then please don't worry her. She has already suffered so much.

EBELING.

Very well, then, I'll proceed upon the assumption that I have only to comply with the request that brought you to me to-day.

FRAU V. YBURG.

If you would——

EBELING.

Hush! (*Listens at the door, then pointing to the right.*) May I ask you to go out this door? You know your way.

FRAU V. YBURG.

And please, please, spare her delicacy. You've no idea how pure she is—in spite of——

EBELING.

If I didn't know *that*— (*Knocking. He opens the door, right.*) Good-bye.

(FRAU V. YBURG *goes out.*)

EBELING.

Come in.

THE SERVANT.

A young lady is outside. She wants to know whether her mother is still here.

EBELING.

(*Hurrying to the centre door—vivaciously.*) Just fancy Fräulein Margot, your mother thought you'd no longer be coming, and has only just left. (MARGOT *appears at the centre door, and stands there, hesitating.*) But won't you come in for a few moments?

MARGOT.

Gladly, if I may. (*Looking about irresolutely.*) Only I don't know whether I——

EBELING.

What, my dear child?

MARGOT.

It isn't usually mamma's way to go off without me.

EBELING.

Then I'll take you home myself. You need have no fears.

MARGOT.

Oh, I'm not afraid.

EBELING (*inviting her to sit down*).

Won't you——?

MARGOT.

I'd like to look around a bit first; may I? I couldn't a while ago.

EBELING.

I'm only too happy to think that you take some interest in my home.

MARGOT.

Dear me, mamma has so often told me about it. Of late years her visits to you were our principal topic of conversation. I think I've known every tiny nook here for a long, long time.

EBELING.

Really?

MARGOT.

Oh, there's the stand with the horrible law books! (*Sighing.*) Ah, Herr Ebeling, everything in life is Law—and everything is in books.

EBELING.

My dear young girl, the hardest laws are never to be found in books.

MARGOT.

Yes, you are right. The laws that drag us down to destruction are the laws that we make for ourselves. And all those beautiful women! I suppose one must be very beautiful to join them?

EBELING (*parrying lightly*).

Most of them are clients who have presented me with their pictures as a token of gratitude.

MARGOT.

Well, but I'm your client, too—and yet I should never dare to offer you my picture in that way.

EBELING.

If you only——

MARGOT (*startled*).

Oh, and there's your— (*Looks at him questioningly, confused.*)

EBELING.

Yes, that's my former wife.

MARGOT.

I saw her only once in my life. I was a mere child then. She was very lovely.

EBELING.

Yes, she was lovely.

MARGOT.

Oh, and the wonder—wonderful roses! Mamma has told me that you always have such lovely roses.

EBELING (*lightly*).

Yes, I have an agreement with a gardener. He keeps me supplied.

MARGOT (*seemingly convinced*).

Oh!

EBELING.

May I present them to you, Fräulein Margot?

MARGOT.

Oh, dear me, no. The gardener who keeps you supplied might be offended.

EBELING (*laughing*).

As you wish.

MARGOT.

And this is the inquisitional chair—where the poor secrets are dragged out?

EBELING.

Quite the contrary! The secrets come forth of their own accord. I always have to say "stop."

MARGOT.

Well, then, I needn't hesitate to sit down. (*Does so.*) *My* secret you know—(*sighing*)—only too well!

EBELING.

My dear Fräulein Margot; the real secret of your life, the law that governs your thoughts and feelings, I believe no one knows—not even your mother.

MARGOT (*smiling and shrugging her shoulders*).

My good mamma! And I'm here to give you proofs of that fact, am I?

EBELING (*evasively*).

Oh!

MARGOT.

The reason for my being here isn't the one you've given me.

EBELING.

Indeed! What is it?

MARGOT.

I wasn't left here alone for nothing! Please go ahead, Herr Ebeling, do your duty and talk me nicely into marrying Baron von—(*shudders*). See?—I've never once been able to bring his name to my lips. And yet I'm to pass my whole life with that man! Can one picture anything more horrible? (*Shudders again.*) Do you know of any occupation for me, Herr Ebeling?

EBELING.

Occupation? Why?

MARGOT.

I want to leave home.

EBELING

Is that your earnest intention?

MARGOT (*nods*).

But, unfortunately, I've learned nothing. And then—it has to be an occupation that wouldn't humiliate me—and that wouldn't spoil my hands (*takes off her gloves*), for I love my hands. I don't care a bit about my face, but my hands—they're like two friends. I can keep up long conversations with them—especially with the left. That one's so weak. So, something that wouldn't spoil the hands—and would leave me time for reading—and—well, I want to be alone.

EBELING.

I might have suggested nursing, even though it requires the constant use of the hands. But, of course, you'd never be alone.

MARGOT.

No. I have no love for my fellow-creatures. I don't want to do anything for them.

EBELING.

Those are hard words, Fräulein Margot.

MARGOT.

I am hard. What have my fellow-creatures ever done for me?

EBELING.

And—your parents?

MARGOT.

You refer to mamma? Mamma certainly means well. But mamma has torn my soul from my body. She has made use of the old principle of family rule—which may have had some sense in the Stone Age—and has turned me into a doll, a doll-creature that moves its eyes and says *ba* when you press its head.—Just watch, Herr Ebeling!—Now haven't I a touching fashion of casting up my eyes when I look at you in this simple, thoughtful, innocent way?—And when I let the lids fall again in all the bashful piety that I still can muster—isn't it simply sweet?

EBELING (*earnestly*).

My dear young girl, I really believe I must begin to say "stop" now!

MARGOT.

Dear me! You're already disgusted with me! But if you had any idea—do you know what you'd think? "Pity that I wasted such pains on a creature like her!"

EBELING.

I should never think that, my dear child. I should only pity you and love you the more.

MARGOT.

I don't want to be pitied! And loved? (*Shakes her head.*) At least not that way—and not the other, either. That's still stupider. When I listen to my friends—this

one loves me, and that one loves me, and this one kept my glove, and that one kissed my handkerchief—ugh! It reminds me of the cackling of a lot of hens. Herr Ebeling, do you believe criminals are scornful?

EBELING.

Why do you ask?

MARGOT.

Please answer.

EBELING.

It's very often true of born criminals.

MARGOT.

Well, then, I've the criminal nature.

EBELING (*laughing against his will*).

Tut, tut, my dear child, why so—all of a sudden?

MARGOT.

Because I inwardly shrug my shoulders at everything that goes by the name of Innocence. I keep thinking to myself, "You silly sheep, what do you know about it?"—Ah, and yet, I envy them! At the balls, I see everything as through a veil. The things that the men chatter about sound far, far away—oceans off. I always feel like saying, "Don't trouble about me. Go to that girl over there. She's stupid enough." And then—after I've come home—I weep, weep from sheer envy and utter boredom, weep

until I have to turn my pillow.—And mamma? Mamma drags me from ball to ball: I mustn't be unlike the others, you know!

EBELING.

My dear child, if this goes against your nature, why don't you make some resistance? Why don't you show your mother that you have thoughts and feelings of your own which must be respected?

MARGOT.

Ah, my dear Herr Ebeling, just be a whipped dog yourself, year in year out! The dog doesn't resist either—but suddenly, some day—when he's at the very end of his endurance—he bites his master's hand. I shall bite soon!

EBELING.

Oh, I'll grant you that your mother has probably made some mistakes. But only out of love, or because she knew no better. Just ask yourself what would have become of you if you'd been left to yourself all this time?

MARGOT.

I should have been embittered just the same—you're right—but I should not have let myself fall.

EBELING.

Who knows?

MARGOT.

Never! And I'll tell you something to prove it. Severely as I have been watched—and—surely there's nothing coquettish about me?

EBELING.

Certainly not.

MARGOT.

You can believe me when I say that, in the general moral tone prevailing over our society just now—and of which our mothers naturally know nothing—there lurks a temptation which has over and over again enticed even me. Such things are so personal, so secret—one cannot describe them. Oh, I could have done whatever I wished! But I said to myself: the first time, you were ignorant, you were sacrificed—or, at least, you can make yourself believe that you were sacrificed—but if ever again—no, I can't say it after all!

EBELING.

I understand, my child.

MARGOT.

If ever again—then you'll be lost—forever! Then there can be no more ideals, no more poetry—nothing lofty—nothing for which to work—and, worst of all, nothing of which to dream. For to dream—ah, one must dream, mustn't one? When one no longer has *that!*——

EBELING (*moved*).

Yes, dear child.

MARGOT.

But you mustn't think that I'm trying to make myself interesting, or that I stand here before you beautifully whitened and purified! Oh, no! What I'm going to say to you now has never been said to any one, to any man before. And you are going to despise me utterly. But I must say it—once, once in my life—and then the old hypocrisy can go on again. Well, I don't know what it is, but it's like a fire in me. No, worse, much worse! When I think of that frightful man, my heart fairly shrivels up. And yet—I can never get away from it. There's always a terror, a horror in me; and yet there is always an eternal—an eternal hunger. Yes—a restlessness—a search—the whole day long. It's strongest toward twilight. Then I want to go out—out into the wide world—to fly to unknown lands. Then I think to myself—out there, no one knows you; out there, there is no sin. Ah, it's as if I were lashed! And I heap such reproaches upon myself because of it! Even now you have not heard the worst. I must tell you the worst, too. Well, you know how I hate that man—yet, sometimes it seems to me that I must go to him and say to him—Behold, here I am again!

EBELING (*jumps up, muttering to himself*).

What has he done? The scoundrel! The blackguard!

MARGOT.

There! Now you know on whom you've wasted your sympathy! Now I can go. (*Stands up, snatches her muff, and prepares to leave.*)

EBELING.

(*Who has been silently walking up and down—more hotly.*) It appears then that you still—love—that man.

MARGOT (*with a short, cutting laugh*).

Oh, Herr Ebeling, if you've gathered *that* from all I've said, then I might just as well have addressed myself to the four walls. I've been hoping for three long years that you would secretly manage the thing in such a way that I'd never have to see him again in all my life—never, never—not even from a distance.

EBELING.

Why did you never confide in me before? Why to-day for the first time?

MARGOT.

Can one do such a thing? Is one ever allowed to? I'm a well-bred young girl, you know. I must observe the conventions. How I came to do it to-day, I don't know myself. But formerly when you were alone with me, did you ever, at any time, give me to understand, even by a

glance, that you—you knew anything—about me? Do you think such an attitude gives one courage? Ah, and in my need I've prayed so often, "Dear God, let him see into my soul! If *he* doesn't free me, no one will." Instead, you've only plunged me the deeper—pushed me before you—always deeper into misery—into the arms of that beast—into the filth. (*Sinks into a chair, sobbing.*)

EBELING.

(*Regards her confusedly, then approaches her.*) Dear child! That wasn't my intention! (*Laying his hand on her shoulder caressingly.*) My dear, dear child!

MARGOT.

(*Grasps his hand, and presses her cheek to it. As he tries to free it, she holds it the more closely.*) Oh, don't leave me. I'm *so* lonely!

EBELING.

My dear, dear child. (*He bends down to her and kisses her on the brow. She throws her arms about his neck and draws herself close to him. He kisses her lips. She lets her head fall heavily upon his shoulder and remains motionless while he caresses her gently. With a sudden impulse she flings him from her, and sinks back in the chair.*) Margot, my darling. Have I hurt you? Are you offended at

what I did? If I've misunderstood, if I have abused your confidence, I earnestly beg you to forgive me.

MARGOT.

Oh, I've so hungered—so hungered—for this—kiss!

EBELING (*turning eagerly toward her*).

Margot!

MARGOT (*warding him off*).

No! Go away! Go away!

EBELING.

But you don't refuse me? And I'm not too old?

MARGOT (*passionately bursting into laughter*).

Oh!

EBELING.

I was never free from the fear that you might not see anything in me except an image of that wasted, old creature. (*Instead of answering,* MARGOT *stretches out her arms to him with a soft cry of longing.* EBELING *draws the low stool to the writing-chair on which she is sitting, sits down upon it, and embraces her.*) Margot, my youth, my whole youth that I've squandered and frittered away comes back to me once more through you. And now all will be well with you, too. It was only a nightmare. Your true self had nothing to do with it. Only—you must take heart again—you must think of yourself now.

MARGOT (*ecstatically*).

Yes, I am equal to anything now. I am not afraid to face the worst. I can even marry that man. I shall send him my acceptance quite calmly.—Of course. Why not?

EBELING (*shocked*).

What!

MARGOT.

Why should you be astonished at that? Now that I know you love me? Only for a year! Perhaps for two! Yes, two! Oh, please, two! Then, later, when you've left me, let others come! It's all the same, who! For marriage, of course, I'm entirely spoiled! But I'll be revenged on him! On him and on Virtue and on Loyalty and on all that stuff with which they've so long tormented me. And the evening before my wedding—then may I—come to you again? Toward twilight! It must be on a Sunday. I'll arrange for that, so we can be alone. Ah, I shall count the days till then! Why do you look at me like that? (EBELING *stands up and throws himself on the sofa, burying his face in his hands. A long pause.*) What can I have done? (*She stands up. Another pause.*) Surely I haven't done you any wrong by loving you?

EBELING.

Go home now, my child.

MARGOT.

I wanted to leave some time ago, but you made me stay. (*She buttons her coat, throws on her boa, and is about to go out. Then she turns around resolutely, and places herself before him.*) Oh, I know—I'm disgraced—I'm not worthy of anything better—; but I needn't have had to endure *such* scorn and contempt! (EBELING *rises, looks at her, groans, buries his face in his hands, and falls back into the chair.* MARGOT *kneels beside him, weeping.*) Dear—dearest—what is it? What's wrong, my darling?

EBELING (*compelling himself to be composed*).

Stand up! (*She does so.*) I am going to tell you. (*Stands up himself.*) I asked your mother's consent to my marrying you to-day. There, now you know it. Good-bye. (*Sits down in the writing-chair. A pause.*)

MARGOT.

(*Does not move. Her face becomes hard and bitter.*) And now that you see what sort I am——H'm, yes. Ah, well, you'll soon console yourself. There are so many others. Why should it be just I? Let me suggest one of my friends—a dear—a pretty girl—with white teeth. Why take it to heart? It hurts for the moment—but one easily forgets. Such girls as I deserve nothing better. To them —one does this! (*Plucks the petals from the roses which*

are standing before her in the vase.) And then one throws them away—like this! (*Throws the petals in his face.*)

EBELING (*brushing away the petals*).

What have the roses done to you, my child?

MARGOT.

I sent them to you. I, too, may destroy them.

EBELING (*springing up*).

It was *you*, you who all these years——?

MARGOT.

Good evening, Herr Ebeling. (*She goes out.*)

EBELING.

(*Pauses for a moment irresolutely, struggling with himself, then hurries after her. His voice is heard.*) Stay here! Stay here! Come in here! (*He reappears at the centre door, pulling her by the arm.*) Come in here! Come back!

MARGOT.

What do you want of me? I'll cry for help——

EBELING.

Come here! (*Drags her to the writing-table.*)

MARGOT.

Leave me alone!

EBELING.

Be quiet! Be quiet! (*Picks up one of the pictures standing on the table.*) There! That woman dragged my name in the gutter. Will you do the same? Answer me! (MARGOT *stands motionless, the tears running down her cheeks.*) Answer, I say.

MARGOT (*slowly and heavily*).

Ah, one thinks and says so much when there's no longer a particle of hope in one's life.

EBELING.

I understand. (*He throws the picture on the ground; frame and glass are dashed to pieces.*) Let us go to your parents. We'll arrange with them what's best to be done. (*As she doesn't move.*) Well? (MARGOT *shakes her head.*) You don't want to?

MARGOT.

Not that way! As I am now, humiliated—mortified—disgraced—no, not that way! I am so tired of playing Magdalen! No! When I come, I'll come with a free step. I'll be able to look every man in the face! But I must find out first what I am still worth, and (*looking him full in the face*) it must be a great, great deal—to be worthy of you.

EBELING (*moved*).

Give me your hands, dear.

MARGOT (*doing so*).

When we see each other again, they'll be red and ugly. (EBELING *kisses her hands and presses them to his face.*) Good-bye. (*She turns to go.*)

CURTAIN.

III

THE LAST VISIT

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

THE UNKNOWN LADY.
LIEUTENANT VON WOLTERS.
MULBRIDGE, a horse-trainer.
HIS WIFE.
DAISY, their daughter.
KELLERMANN.
TEMPSKI, an orderly.
A GROOM.

THE PRESENT DAY.

The scene is laid in a large German garrison.

THE LAST VISIT

A richly furnished room which bears the stamp of the military tastes of its owner. In the background, a curtained doorway flanked by two columns wound with crape and garlands of fir. In front of the columns, several piles of wreaths. Doors on the right and left. In the foreground, on the right, a window. Near the window, a writing-table. On the left, a sofa, table, and chairs. Mirrors on the walls. A clock. When the curtain of the centre door is drawn aside, a coffin covered with wreaths and flowers is indistinctly visible.

As the curtain rises, DAISY MULBRIDGE *is standing motionless, looking through the curtained doorway into the room behind. She is a very young girl, with blonde hair, and is dressed in black. The sound of a hammer is heard, and with each stroke she winces a little, though betraying no other sign of emotion. For a few moments there is no sound except the voices in the back room. Then enter slowly, one by one,* FRAU MULBRIDGE, MULBRIDGE, TEMPSKI, *and the* GROOM. FRAU MULBRIDGE *is a simple, middle-aged woman dressed in black. Her husband is a small, wiry, smooth-faced man whose hair is slightly gray; he is dressed in his stable clothes.* TEMPSKI *wears the uniform of an Uhlan.*

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Well, now we have seen our poor, dear captain for the last time.

MULBRIDGE.

Yes. He was a good fellow, our captain—and awfully fond of horses.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Why, Daisy, what's the matter, dear? You've been standing here all alone, and yet, until now, you wouldn't stir from the coffin.

DAISY.

I saw him quite well from here, mother, dear.

MULBRIDGE (*caressing her*).

My girlie—my little girl. Yes—we all loved him.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

(*To* TEMPSKI, *who is sobbing.*) There, there, Tempski, hush now. (*A bell rings, right.*) There's the bell; go and open the door. (TEMPSKI *goes out at the right.*)

MULBRIDGE (*to the* GROOM).

And we'll be off to the stables!

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Sh! The Lieutenant!

MULBRIDGE (*to the* GROOM).

Go on! (*Pushes the* GROOM *out, left.*)

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V. WOLTERS.

H'm! Well then, listen carefully. If the undertaker—or any other stranger—should still be here when it begins to grow dark, throw on a wrap and wait at the door downstairs until a carriage stops. Will you?

DAISY.

Certainly I will. And Tempski?

V. WOLTERS.

Yes, Tempski, faithful as he is——

DAISY.

Tempski was *never* around in those days.

V. WOLTERS (*looking at her in astonishment*).

Oh—so Tempski—was never—around—in those days! H'm! Well then, I'll undertake to get rid of Tempski myself. Thank you, my child. (*Gives her his hand, then aloud.*) I have another errand, but I'll be back soon. (*Goes out at the right.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

What did the lieutenant want of you?

DAISY.

Nothing in particular—something about the wreaths.

KELLERMANN (*coming in from the back*).

Yes, with all those wreaths, we'll have to have an extra carriage for the flowers. He was a fine man, he was—a highly respected man! And on horseback! Why, I've won every time I bet on him! Ah, yes, but sooner or later they all have to come to me!

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

And he was such a kind master! He was just like a child sometimes—so light-hearted and happy—like a little boy! Lately, to be sure, he— (*The bell rings.*) Well, Daisy!

DAISY.

(*Who has stood without moving, lost in thought.*) I suppose Tempski will go.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Yes, yes, you're right. Tempski is outside.

TEMPSKI (*brings in a wreath, sobbing*).

F–from—our—major.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Why, Tempski, it's perfectly natural that the major——

TEMPSKI.

From—our—major.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Take the wreath from him, Daisy.

DAISY.

Yes, mother, dear. (*She does so.* TEMPSKI *goes out, crying.*)

KELLERMANN (*reaching for the wreath*).

From his major—that must go on the coffin!

DAISY.

I'll do it.

KELLERMANN (*in doubt*).

Don't you think——?

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Yes, let her; she looks after everything.

KELLERMANN.

But nail it tightly, little lady—else it'll fall off when they're carrying him to the church.

DAISY.

Yes, yes. (*Goes out back with the wreath. During the following conversation, the strokes of a hammer are heard.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Everything is so well arranged here. I don't see why they've got to take him to the church.

KELLERMANN.

The official statement is that it will prevent any demonstration in the street. You know, the town folks haven't taken very kindly to this murdering business of late. But, of course, that's not the real reason. The truth of the matter is that several very influential ladies would like to attend the funeral without being seen. H'm!—love never dies, they say. Ah, the captain was no saint, I can tell you!

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

What do you know about it?

KELLERMANN.

Oh, well, there's a lot of talk about the veiled figures that used to go in and out of here at twilight. And if these mirrors could speak—! That reminds me—I'd almost forgotten—we must cover the mirrors. (DAISY *appears in front of the curtain. She is staring into space.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

But since the casket is to be taken away in less than an hour—what's the use?

KELLERMANN.

That doesn't make any difference. The mirrors have got to be draped. It would be a blemish on my art—and I wouldn't answer for it.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Daisy!

DAISY.

Yes, mother, dear.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Go get a pair of lace curtains to hang over the mirrors.

DAISY.

Yes, mother, dear. (*She does not stir.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Daisy! You're not listening.

DAISY.

Yes I am, mother, dear. You asked me to— (*Falters.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

I asked you to fetch a pair of lace curtains.

DAISY.

Yes, mother, dear. (*Goes out, left.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Now that the child isn't here—tell me, Herr Kellermann, do you know anything about the cause of the duel? We're all groping in the dark here at the house.

KELLERMANN.

Well, they're saying all sorts of things. But the dead are my friends. I never say anything against them. It's a business principle with me.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Yes—but the man who shot him, is he still walking around free as air?

KELLERMANN.

Yes, that's the way with these fine folks. They fall upon one another like highwaymen. Your honour or your life! The man who survives can laugh. The man who falls—well, he falls into my arms. But, see here, getting into a duel with that fellow, that Baron Renoir—why it was nothing short of suicide! I tell you, where that man goes, no grass grows! On the turf, at the card-table, with the women—always the same story. That man shot him down like a rabbit. Oh, of course, it's always a fine thing to lay down your life for a woman. That's a phrase that——

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Do you really think that a woman——?

KELLERMANN.

Sh! Here comes your little girl. (DAISY *enters with two vases, which she is carrying very carefully.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

What's that you're bringing?

DAISY.

I stopped and filled them first.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

But you were to get a pair of lace curtains!

DAISY.

Oh, forgive me, mother, dear. I thought you said vases. I'll go— (*Exit with the vases.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

I don't know what's come over the child! Why, she's been such a help these days—thought of everything, wanted to do everything herself.

KELLERMANN.

A nice little girl—how old is she?

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Seventeen, her last birthday.

KELLERMANN.

Is she at school?

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

She's been going to the Art Institute. She wants to teach drawing.

KELLERMANN.

I suppose the captain thought a lot of her?

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Oh, dear me, yes. She was always around him from the time that she was a mere child. They used to play to-

gether out in the yard like two little kittens! Of course, when she grew older, that sort of thing stopped. But lately, when he seemed so worried, I——

KELLERMANN.

So he seemed worried, did he?

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Yes, indeed. I've had my suspicions for the last two months. Well, when he seemed so worried, I used to manage to send her in to him pretty often. She read aloud to him—and so on. (DAISY *enters with a couple of curtains, and a dark coat on her arm.*)

KELLERMANN.

Thanks, thanks, little lady. (*Takes the curtains from her and stands on a chair under one of the mirrors.*) What lovely Venetian lace! Ah, yes, every mirror comes to this sooner or later!

DAISY.

I'd like to get a breath of fresh air, would you mind, mother, dear? I feel so——

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Yes, yes, dear. Go out for a little while. (DAISY *puts on her coat.*)

KELLERMANN (*in front of the other mirror*).

Why, here's a little bunch of flowers!

DAISY (*eagerly*).

Oh, please, please, let me have it.

KELLERMANN (*blowing off the dust*).

If it doesn't fall to pieces. (*Hands it to her.*) Ah, yes, many, many loved him! He had a beautiful life, he had a beautiful death, and, as for a beautiful funeral—just leave that to Kellermann! (*Takes his hat.*) I'll be back again for the procession. Good evening, ladies.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Good evening. (*To* DAISY, *seeing her take off her coat.*) I thought you said you were going out?

DAISY.

Oh, well, I've changed my mind now.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

I'm glad, because one feels so—so alone in here.

DAISY (*with a glance backward*).

But we are not alone yet.

FRAU MULBRIDGE (*shuddering slightly*).

That's just it.

DAISY (*staring straight before her*).

I'm not afraid.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Tell me something, Daisy, dear. Weren't you in there last night?

DAISY (*alarmed*).

Last night? I?

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Yes, at the coffin.

DAISY.

What should I be doing at the coffin?

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Well, I thought I heard some one go past the door.

DAISY.

You must have been dreaming, mother, dear.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Very likely. I haven't been sleeping well these nights. See here, Daisy, perhaps he's left us something—you, at least—tell me, haven't you been thinking about that sometimes?

DAISY (*apart, with a glance at the clock*).

If she doesn't come soon——!

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

What's that you were saying? (*The bell rings.* DAISY *starts.*) Why, what's the matter with you? (v. WOLTERS *enters.*)

V. WOLTERS (*calling*).

Tempski!

TEMPSKI (*at the threshold, in military attitude*).

Here, Lieutenant!

V. WOLTERS.

Hurry over to the garrison church and see if everything is ready.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Why, Kellermann will see——

V. WOLTERS.

And then go—or no—stay there until the casket arrives. Do you understand?

TEMPSKI.

At your command, Lieutenant. (*He goes out.*)

V. WOLTERS.

That's attended to. And now, my dear Frau Mulbridge, there's something that I want to confide to you. A visitor is coming here presently—a lady. (FRAU MULBRIDGE *glances anxiously at* DAISY, *who nods.*) She is not to be seen by any one—except Daisy. Daisy, it appears, used to open the door for her sometimes in former days.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Daisy—? What does this mean?

DAISY.

Oh, Tempski might have gossiped, you know.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

And so he let *you* open the door?

DAISY.

I never gossip, mother.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

I'm finding things out now! Why did I never hear of this before?

DAISY.

Oh, you were always in the stables with father in the evening.

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

And there I was trying to keep this child from any knowledge of the things that went on in here—and he——

V. WOLTERS.

We've no time for that now, Frau Mulbridge. Daisy, you will watch outside, won't you?

FRAU MULBRIDGE (*protesting*).

Oh, that's too——

DAISY (*firmly*).

Yes, I'll watch. (*The bell rings softly.*) Should I——? (V. WOLTERS *nods.*)

FRAU MULBRIDGE (*calling her back*).

Daisy! (DAISY *goes out without noticing her mother.*)

V. WOLTERS.

May I ask, Frau Mulbridge, that you——

FRAU MULBRIDGE.

Very well. We have served him faithfully, and I'll not start making any trouble now at the end. (*Exit, left.* V. WOLTERS *goes to the door at the right, listens, and then opens it cautiously.* THE UNKNOWN LADY *enters. She is heavily veiled, dressed entirely in black, and carries a spray of white roses. As she enters, she staggers slightly and leans against the writing-table for support.*)

V. WOLTERS (*who has softly locked the door*).

May I show you the way, Countess? (THE LADY *shakes her head and motions questioningly toward the back.* V. WOLTERS *nods, and she goes out through the curtained doorway. After a short pause,* V. WOLTERS *opens the door at the right.*)

V. WOLTERS (*calling*).

Daisy! (DAISY *appears at the threshold.*) Kindly see that no one enters the house while this lady is here—no one, do you understand?

DAISY.

Oh, yes, I understand very well.

V. WALTERS.

It may be that she has something else to say to me. If the men should come for the casket before she has left, take them around the other way. Keep the main entrance clear.

DAISY.

No, that wouldn't be safe.

V. WOLTERS.

Well, what shall we do?

DAISY (*breathing heavily*).

I'll—think of something.

V. WOLTERS.

His death grieves you, too, dear child?

DAISY,

Me? Oh, yes—me too. (*She goes out.* V. WOLTERS *walks to and fro, pauses to listen in front of the curtain, turns on the electric lamp, again walks to and fro, etc. At a slight movement of the curtain, he stops, expectant.* THE LADY, *still veiled, comes forward slowly until she has reached one of the chairs on the left. A pause.*)

THE LADY.

Ah, Herr von Wolters—to let them close the coffin before I—I had seen him—I must confess, I had not expected that of you, Herr von Wolters.

V. WOLTERS.

I didn't dare prevent it, Countess—just because of your coming. It was the only way to have the house to ourselves.

THE LADY.

Don't call me countess, Herr von Wolters. I am not a countess here. (*Glancing toward the door.*) I am only an unhappy woman whom no one in this house knows, whom no one is to know.

V. WOLTERS.

Wouldn't you care to rest for a moment?

THE LADY.

Are we quite safe here?

V. WOLTERS.

Quite. The little girl who, you say, is not unknown to you, is outside at the entrance. I have told her mother of your visit and she will not enter the house. If you wish, however, we can lock the door.

THE LADY.

Yes, do. Or, no, perhaps it would be better not to—in case any one——

V. WOLTERS.

Very well.

THE LADY.

(*Throws back her veil, revealing a very beautiful face, which is deathly pale and wears an expression of the deepest*

affliction. She sinks into the chair. A pause.) I wanted to lay my roses on his breast. Ah, Herr von Wolters, I loved that man with an infinite love. Perhaps grief will give my life a new and holier meaning—who knows? We seek beauty—and find grief. Tell me, Herr von Wolters, you were his best friend, did you never suspect——?

V. WOLTERS.

Never, never.

THE LADY.

And when you received my letter early this morning asking you to come at once—not even then?

V. WOLTERS.

I could draw—various conclusions—from that.

THE LADY.

For instance——?

V. WOLTERS.

Oh, please—really, you must excuse me——

THE LADY.

No, Herr von Wolters. We are here—but why don't you sit down? (*He does so.*) We are here together, you and I, to hold the last rites over our sainted dead. His friend and his beloved—who else has any right to be here? Herr von Wolters, I have given you my full confidence—I have made a strange confession to you. You will not betray me?

V. WOLTERS.

Ah!

THE LADY.

And so, in this sacred hour, there must be no concealment between us. Answer me now. What does the world say?

V. WOLTERS (*embarrassed*).

The world says so many things, Countess.

THE LADY.

Tell me, to what extent has my name been associated with this affair?

V. WOLTERS.

I can't conceal the fact from you, Countess. Your name is mentioned.

THE LADY (*thoughtfully*).

Yes, that's what my husband says.

V. WOLTERS.

But please let me add that not a shadow, not the slightest suspicion, has ever——

THE LADY.

But what else can they think?

V. WOLTERS.

My dear Countess, when a woman is as beauti— I mean, that when a woman is the centre of so much in-

terest, it's not surprising that some notice was taken of the attentions which he——

THE LADY (*somewhat impatiently*).

Yes—but——?

V. WOLTERS.

It naturally was observed that my friend——

THE LADY.

Our friend had a—what shall I say—a susceptible heart. We knew that, who knew him so well. This was not the first time he had—been interested in a woman. And that was why I arranged to have him seen in our house as little as possible—lately, not at all.

V. WOLTERS.

That fact did not escape notice, Countess. And as Baron Renoir was frequently seen with you—instead of——

THE LADY (*somewhat excited*).

Don't mention that name, Herr von Wolters! I can't stand it! What could have possessed that man Renoir—? But do tell me the rest. I've heard only the merest details. They've only told me what they thought necessary.

V. WOLTERS.

No one knows what actually occurred between the two men. He begged me to ask no questions. You know, he

was so reserved of late. It may be that certain expressions which passed between them a few days ago—after they had been drinking—had something to do with it—no one knows. Perhaps there was some insult which was given in private—and which neither of them would make public. The assurance that the injury, whatever it may have been, was irreparable, must satisfy us.

THE LADY.

Oh, how I hate that man Renoir!—quite apart from the trouble which he has gotten me into! My husband warned me against him long ago. "That scoundrel will compromise you some day," he said, "and then I'll have to fight a duel with him." Instead—this! Oh, you poor, poor darling! And now, when all was so quiet and peaceful between us!

V. WOLTERS.

My dear Countess, if you think that the change which came over him in the last few months betokened peace and quiet——

THE LADY (*nervously*).

I don't know anything about that! It wasn't my fault! Was I to blame if he insisted on having notions? Tell me one thing, Herr von Wolters, did he die easily?

V. WOLTERS.

No one dies easily, Countess.

THE LADY.

Was he still living when they reached the house?

V. WOLTERS.

No, he died on the field.

THE LADY.

Do you know my first name, Herr von Wolters?

V. WOLTERS.

Certainly.

THE LADY (*hesitating*).

Did he—by any chance—speak—that name?

V. WOLTERS.

That would have betrayed his secret, Countess.

THE LADY.

I only meant—at the very last—when he was no longer —conscious.

V. WOLTERS.

No, Countess. But—pardon me, I don't want to be indelicate—but did he ever call you by some little—little term of endearment—some— (*Stops, embarrassed.*)

THE LADY.

Why do you ask?

V. WOLTERS.

At the very end, he kept murmuring something that sounded like "Girlie"—or——

THE LADY (*indignantly*).

My dear Herr von Wolters, our intimacy was of a different sort.

V. WOLTERS.

Pardon me, Countess, but you yourself asked. (*She nods. A short pause.*)

THE LADY.

Good heavens—these curtains over the mirrors! They make me feel as if I were looking a blind man in the eyes!

V. WOLTERS.

Would you like to have me remove them?

THE LADY.

No, no. Never mind. I want to ask you something, Herr von Wolters. Tell me, what do you think of me?

V. WOLTERS (*confused*).

What do you mean, Countess?

THE LADY.

I want to know what I have done that I should be doomed to bring so much sorrow into the lives of others. I had only just left school when a strange young man shot himself under my window. It was on my account that my husband was transferred here from his former garrison. Tell me, what mark of Cain do I bear that all men follow

me? I dress as simply as I can. I never go out without a double veil. Sometimes I have actually been tempted to throw vitriol in my face!

v. WOLTERS (*candidly*).

Oh, that would have been a shame, Countess!

THE LADY (*severely*).

Herr von Wolters!

v. WOLTERS.

Yes, Countess, to mar that image of divinity would be a sin—and I do not hesitate to repeat it beside the coffin of my friend.

THE LADY.

Don't! (*Reaches him her hand, which he kisses respectfully.*) Dear me, how strange it seems! Yesterday we scarcely knew each other—those few visits at my house don't count. To-day—this short conversation—and here we are, sitting side by side, the guardians of a secret which will be buried forever—with him. It will, Herr von Wolters?

v. WOLTERS.

Ah, my dear Countess, please do not offend me.

THE LADY.

Very well, I shall not worry. Did you love him very dearly?

V. WOLTERS.

I thought a great deal of him, Countess. He took care of me when I was a young fellow quite alone in the world. He was so— Really, I don't know how I shall— (*breaking down.*)

THE LADY.

Courage, dear friend! We must both try to be brave.

V. WOLTERS (*firmly*).

Thank you, Countess. You will not have to reprove me again.

THE LADY.

You evaded my question before. Do you consider me very guilty, Herr von Wolters?

V. WOLTERS.

He loved you, Countess. That makes you holy in my eyes.

THE LADY.

I thank you for that word—little as I deserve it. It has never been my way to undervalue myself. But your opinion meant so much to me——

V. WOLTERS (*puzzled*).

What difference could my humble opinion——

THE LADY.

Don't say that, my dear friend. There are few people—perhaps not even my own husband—who have ever seen

me as you see me at this moment—so weak, so helpless, so —I had almost said—unguarded. Remember that—and spare me.

V. WOLTERS.

I hope that I have not been inconsiderate, Countess.

THE LADY.

(*Putting her hand to her brow, stammering.*) No, no, no; it's—it's grieving for him that makes me lose my wits. The world had so long set me on a pedestal that I thought I belonged there. Now I feel as if I were torn down. Now I lie there— Herr von Wolters, pay no attention to me!

V. WOLTERS.

If I could only help you, Countess!

THE LADY (*smiling sorrowfully*).

Help me—you? And yet, why not? His friend and his beloved! It is we, you and I, who are paying the last honours to the dead. Who could know his worth better than we? Whose grief could be more eloquent than ours? No, no, no—I must not talk. Ah, I see him before me now with his bright, careless smile—his conqueror's smile! I hope you never were as successful with women as he was?

V. WOLTERS.

My dear Countess, I lead a fairly quiet, uneventful life.

THE LADY.

But you're not—you're not a Puritan, are you?

V. WOLTERS.

I must let others judge of that, Countess.

THE LADY.

Oh! I should like to cry out my sorrow to the whole world—say to them all, "You sordid souls, you couldn't know how much I loved him! What do I care if you damn me, if you——" (*The bell rings. She starts.*) There's the bell!

V. WOLTERS (*reassuringly*).

Probably just a wreath.

THE LADY.

And if it's not—a——?

V. WOLTERS.

Why, Daisy is outside. But to make sure— (*Listens at the door, then opens it cautiously.*) Daisy! (THE LADY *drops her veil.* DAISY *appears at the threshold.*)

DAISY.

What is it, Herr von Wolters?

V. WOLTERS.

Who rang?

DAISY.

It was a wreath.

V. WOLTERS (*to* THE LADY).

Just as I supposed.

THE LADY (*to* DAISY).

Come here, dear. (DAISY *comes forward.*) You used to open the door for me, didn't you?

DAISY.

Yes.

THE LADY.

But you don't know who I am?

DAISY.

No.

THE LADY.

You'll not try to find out?

DAISY.

Oh, no.

THE LADY.

Was he fond of you?

DAISY.

Oh, yes.

THE LADY.

And have you been crying since he died?

DAISY.

No.

THE LADY.

You're a pretty little girl.

DAISY (*going*).

Has my lady any more questions?

THE LADY.

(*Taking out a gold purse, to* v. WOLTERS.) Do you think one might give her anything? (v. WOLTERS *shakes his head.*) Thank you, dear. We shall see each other again. (*As* DAISY *lingers.*) What is it?

DAISY.

Very well—since I shall see my lady again. (*Goes out.*)

THE LADY.

It did seem though, as if she were waiting for something.

v. WOLTERS.

If you will pardon me for the suggestion, it was surely not—not for money.

THE LADY.

By the way, this incident reminds me of something I was just about to— Herr von Wolters, are you my friend?

v. WOLTERS.

If you consider me worthy of that distinction, Countess.

THE LADY.

Most assuredly. Well, Herr von Wolters, there is something that troubles me—something that desecrates my

grief, if I may use the word. There's the anxiety—the fear that— Yes, yes—I must tell you all. Herr von Wolters, he has my letters. Do you understand? (*He nods.*) Didn't he give you something for me—a small, sealed package, perhaps—nothing?

V. WOLTERS.

You are forgetting, Countess, that I was ignorant of all this until a short time ago.

THE LADY.

Yes, that's true. H'm—it's really too bad. Who has the keys?

V. WOLTERS.

Why, he gave them to me just before the duel. I have them with me.

THE LADY.

You've looked through the writing-table?

V. WOLTERS.

Yes, I had to hand over his papers to the legal authorities. I didn't consider myself entitled to touch his private correspondence at present.

THE LADY.

Why not?

V. WOLTERS.

He made a will the day before the duel.

THE LADY.

Really? In whose favor?

V. WOLTERS.

I don't know.

THE LADY.

What! Didn't he make any allusion—nothing——?

V. WOLTERS.

The only thing he said was that he had named me as executor.

THE LADY.

But he had no relatives. Who is to inherit his large fortune?

V. WOLTERS.

As I've said, I don't know. However, he made a remark that I didn't quite understand, and that I—pardon me—would rather not repeat, if you don't mind.

THE LADY.

Oh, please!

V. WOLTERS.

It might give you pain, Countess.

THE LADY (*sadly*).

Nothing can give me pain—after *this*.

V. WOLTERS.

Well, he said with a decided emphasis—though perhaps he did not intend that I should notice it—he said, "The one who loved me best shall be my heir."

THE LADY.

What! He said that? Who could have loved him best if not I? (*Terrified.*) For God's sake, Herr von Wolters!

V. WOLTERS.

Don't be alarmed, Countess. That would be too grotesque.

THE LADY.

Perhaps this is his revenge.

V. WOLTERS.

Revenge? On you? What for?

THE LADY.

No, no—I'm quite out of my senses, I— But, as you have the keys, you won't mind doing me this slight favour.

V. WOLTERS.

What favour, Countess?

THE LADY.

Search for the letters with me—now. It seems to me your duty, not only as a friend but as a gentleman.

V. WOLTERS.

Pardon me, my dear Countess, you were certainly his last—perhaps his only great love. But his life was varied

—and if we were to open his desk now—I really don't know what we might find there.

THE LADY.

You mean there would be letters from other——?

V. WOLTERS.

I must say no more.

THE LADY.

Well, I'll shut my eyes. I'll only look for my own handwriting.

V. WOLTERS.

The will is to be opened in a few days, Countess. He has doubtless inserted a clause authorising me as executor to return certain papers to their owners—or destroy them.

THE LADY.

Ah, I see you're a Puritan, after all.—No, no, I'll not trouble your conscience. This loyalty which you bear him to the very grave is so beautiful, so poetical, and I feel so near to you because of it—(*Putting her hand over her eyes.*) Oh, those curtains in front of the mirrors! They make me feel as if I were dead myself. (V. WOLTERS *is about to tear them down.*) No, no—don't. Thanks. Tell me, how long will it be before the will is opened?

V. WOLTERS.

Unfortunately, the day is not yet appointed.

THE LADY.

I shall not sleep a moment until then. Not even my love, my grief, can outweigh this terrible fear. My honour, my future, my life—everything is at stake!

V. WOLTERS (*amazed*).

Countess!

THE LADY.

Please stop calling me Countess.

V. WOLTERS.

Forgive me. What should I——?

THE LADY.

Call me your friend. I want to be that. From this day you become closer to me than any other being in all the world. Are you not the legacy, as it were, that our dear dead has left me?—Ah, you and I must become like brother and sister, two beings who have—nothing—to conceal from one another.—Herr von Wolters, will you be my guide, my confidant—my friend?

V. WOLTERS.

Countess! My dear, dear Countess!

THE LADY (*softly*).

But you're not to——

V. WOLTERS.

Forgive me. Your kindness to me makes me feel so—confused—I——

THE LADY.

Why should it? I feel certain that if he could see us at this moment, he himself would join our hands together.

V. WOLTERS.

Countess, if you ever need a man who would let himself be torn to pieces for you——

THE LADY.

No, not that. I only want you to take this great weight from my soul.

V. WOLTERS.

Ah, Countess, I am a man of my word.

THE LADY.

And that's what you call being torn to pieces for me?

V. WOLTERS (*trembling*).

Whether I can answer for this to him and to my own conscience—whether I can ever again think of him—without shame—will depend upon what we shall find in there.

THE LADY.

But you will open it?—(*A pause.*) Herr von Wolters, you'll not let me die of fear and distraction?

V. WOLTERS.

I'll open it.

THE LADY (*laying her hand on his arm*).

Thanks, thanks! Ah, you are good——

V. WOLTERS (*taking out the key*).

Don't thank me. I feel as if he could hear it in there.

THE LADY (*shuddering involuntarily*).

No—no! (V. WOLTERS *turns the key in the keyhole unavailingly.*) Won't it work?—Heavens, why your hand is trembling. Let me have it.

V. WOLTERS (*with a last attempt at resistance*).

The keys were entrusted to *me*, Countess.

THE LADY (*coaxingly*).

Oh, do let me have it. (*Sits at the writing-table and opens the drawer. With a low cry of surprise.*) Empty!

V. WOLTERS (*bending over her*).

Empty?

THE LADY.

Are you sure that this was——?

V. WOLTERS.

Yes, that was the drawer in which he kept his private papers. I'm sure of it.

THE LADY (*staring straight ahead*).

Well, how can you explain——?

V. WOLTERS.

Perhaps he burned everything.

THE LADY (*springing to her feet*).

And perhaps not!—Who knows?—This is the way he played with the honour of the woman who gave him all! This is my thanks! This is the action of a gentleman!

V. WOLTERS.

No gentleman, Countess, can do more than let himself be shot for a woman.

THE LADY.

Who asked him to do it? Was it my fault if jealousy of Renoir drove him mad? And perhaps this is really his revenge! Perhaps we'll live to see even more interesting disclosures!—This is my reward! This— (DAISY *appears at the door in the centre.*) What do you want?

DAISY.

I beg your pardon. My lady is looking for—letters?

THE LADY.

So you've been in there eavesdropping, have you?

DAISY.

I brought in a wreath.

THE LADY.

Well, what do you know about my letters?

DAISY.

Here they are. (*Takes a small package of letters from her dress and hands it to* THE LADY.) I intended to give them to you *secretly* when you left.

THE LADY.

(*Snatches the letters from her hand and looks at them.*) How do you happen to have these letters?

DAISY (*wonderingly*).

Why, how should I happen to have them? He gave them to me.

THE LADY.

To you? Who are you? Why to you?

DAISY.

Because he knew that I would do exactly what he told me to do.

THE LADY (*to* v. WOLTERS).

Can you understand this?

v. WOLTERS (*gently*).

What did he tell you to do, Daisy?

DAISY.

He said to me, "These letters belong to the lady who used to come to see me sometimes. No one is to know about her—not even Herr von Wolters.—When I am dead, the lady will——

V. WOLTERS.

Did he say that?

DAISY.

Yes. "When I am dead, the lady will probably come here again. If she does, give her these letters. If she doesn't, then burn them with the others."

V. WOLTERS.

What others?

DAISY.

Those over there in the stove.

THE LADY (*examining the letters*).

Look at this! Unsealed! Unwrapped!

DAISY (*smiling*).

He knew that I wouldn't read them.

THE LADY.

I suppose from now on I shall be at *your* mercy!

DAISY.

I don't know you, my lady. And even if I did, you need have no fear.

THE LADY (*to* v. WOLTERS).

Isn't she kind!

DAISY (*always respectfully*).

But I should like to ask you a favour, my lady.

THE LADY.

By all means. What could I deny you, my dear?

DAISY.

(*Goes into the room behind and returns with the flowers that* THE LADY *had brought.*) Oh please, please take these roses—away—with you.

THE LADY.

What does this mean?

DAISY (*imploringly*).

Oh, please take them!

THE LADY.

What right have you to make such a shameless request of me?

DAISY.

I heard—forgive me, I didn't want to—I heard the way you spoke about him before. And it seems to me that your flowers no longer belong upon his coffin.

THE LADY.

What do you say to that, Herr von Wolters? This person acts as if she were the mistress of the house!

DAISY (*proudly*).

I am.

THE LADY.

(*Stares at her through her lorgnette and smiles.*) Oh, really!

DAISY (*her bearing pure and proud*).

The night before he died I became—his wife. (*A long pause.*)

THE LADY.

I hope you'll come and take tea with me in the near future, Herr von Wolters.

V. WOLTERS.

Pray, excuse me, but official duties will make it impossible for me to——

THE LADY.

(*Taken aback, but quickly recovering herself.*) Thank you at all events. (*A loud ring.*)

DAISY (*starts and looks at the clock*).

There are the troops already.—Would you be so kind, Herr von Wolters—? Please let no one come in here. (V. WOLTERS *bows and hurries out at the right.*) May I take you out the back way, my lady? No one will see you

—or at least, only my mother. (*As the heavy steps of the soldiers are heard, to herself, in suppressed agony.*) And meanwhile—they will—take the coffin—away! (*Regaining possession of herself.*) But wouldn't it be better to drop your veil? (THE LADY *does so.*) And your roses—do take them! (THE LADY *snatches the roses from her hand.*) This way, please. (*She opens the door at the left and goes out slowly behind* THE LADY, *her eyes turned longingly toward the room behind.*)

CURTAIN.

IV

THE FAR-AWAY PRINCESS

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

THE PRINCESS VON GELDERN.

BARONESS VON BROOK, her maid of honour.

FRAU VON HALLDORF.

LIDDY, MILLY } her daughters.

FRITZ STRÜBEL, a student.

FRAU LINDEMANN.

ROSA, a waitress.

A LACKEY.

THE PRESENT DAY.

The scene is laid at an inn situated above a watering-place in central Germany.

THE FAR-AWAY PRINCESS

The veranda of an inn. The right side of the stage and half of the background represent a framework of glass enclosing the veranda. The left side and the other half of the background represent the stone walls of the house. To the left, in the foreground, a door; another door in the background, at the left. On the left, back, a buffet and serving-table. Neat little tables and small iron chairs for visitors are placed about the veranda. On the right, in the centre, a large telescope, standing on a tripod, is directed through an open window. ROSA, *dressed in the costume of the country, is arranging flowers on the small tables.* FRAU LINDEMANN, *a handsome, stoutish woman in the thirties, hurries in excitedly from the left.*

FRAU LINDEMANN.

There! Now she can come—curtains, bedding—everything fresh and clean as new! No, this honour, this unexpected honour—! Barons and counts have been here often enough. Even the Russian princes sometimes come up from the Springs. I don't bother my head about them—they're just like—that!—But a princess—a real princess!

ROSA.

Perhaps it isn't a real princess after all.

FRAU LINDEMANN (*indignantly*).

What? What do you mean by that!

ROSA.

I was only thinking that a real princess wouldn't be coming to an inn like this. Real princesses won't lie on anything but silks and velvets. You just wait and see; it's a trick!

FRAU LINDEMANN.

Are you going to pretend that the letter isn't genuine;—that the letter is a forgery?

ROSA.

Maybe one of the regular customers is playing a joke. That student, Herr Strübel, he's always joking. (*Giggles.*)

FRAU LINDEMANN.

When Herr Strübel makes a joke, he makes a decent joke, a real, genuine joke. Oh, of course one has to pretend to be angry sometimes—but as for writing a forged letter—My land!—a letter with a gold crown on it—there! (*She takes a letter from her waist, and reads.*) "This afternoon, Her Highness, the Princess von Geldern, will stop at the Fairview Inn, to rest an hour or so before making the descent to the Springs. You are requested to have

ready a quiet and comfortable room, to guard Her Highness from any annoying advances, and, above all, to maintain the strictest secrecy regarding this event, as otherwise the royal visit will not be repeated. Baroness von Brook, maid of honour to Her Highness." Now, what have you got to say?

ROSA.

Herr Strübel lent me a book once. A maid of honour came into that, too. I'm sure it's a trick!

FRAU LINDEMANN (*looking out toward the back*).

Dear, dear, isn't that Herr Strübel now, coming up the hill? To-day of all days! What on earth does he always want up here?

ROSA (*pointedly*).

He's in such favour at the Inn.—He won't be leaving here all day.

FRAU LINDEMANN.

That won't do at all. He's got to be sent off. If I only knew how I could—Oh, ho! I'll be disagreeable to him—that's the only way to manage it!

(STRÜBEL *enters. He is a handsome young fellow without much polish, but cheerful, unaffected, entirely at his ease, and invariably good-natured.*)

STRÜBEL.

Good day, everybody.

FRAU LINDEMANN (*sarcastically*).

Charming day.

STRÜBEL (*surprised at her coolness*).

I say! What's up? Who's been rubbing you the wrong way? May I have a glass of beer any way? Glass of beer, if you please!—Several glasses of beer, if you please. —(*Sits down.*) Pestiferously hot this afternoon.

FRAU LINDEMANN (*after a pause*).

H'm, H'm!

STRÜBEL.

Landlady Linda, dear, why so quiet to-day?

FRAU LINDEMANN.

In the first place, Herr Strübel, I would have you know that my name is Frau Lindemann.

STRÜBEL.

Just so.

FRAU LINDEMANN.

And secondly, if you don't stop your familiarity——

STRÜBEL.

(*Singing, as* ROSA *brings him a glass of beer.*) "Beer —beer!"—Heavens and earth, how hot it is! (*Drinks.*)

FRAU LINDEMANN.

If you find it so hot, why don't you stay quietly down there at the Springs?

STRÜBEL.

Ah, my soul thirsts for the heights—my soul thirsts for the heights every afternoon. Just as soon as ever my sallow-faced pupil has thrown himself down on the couch to give his red corpuscles a chance to grow, "I gayly grasp my Alpine staff and mount to my beloved."

FRAU LINDEMANN (*scornfully*).

Bah!

STRÜBEL.

Oh, you're thinking that *you* are my beloved? No, dearest: my beloved stays down there. But to get nearer to her, I have to come up here—up to your telescope. With the aid of your telescope I can look right into her window —see?

ROSA (*laughing*).

Oh, so that's why——

FRAU LINDEMANN.

Perhaps you think I'm interested in all that?—Besides, I've no more time for you.—Moreover, I'm going to have this place cleaned right away. Good-bye, Herr Strübel. (*Goes out.*)

STRÜBEL (*laughing*).

I certainly caught it that time! See here, Rosa, what's got into her head?

ROSA (*mysteriously*).

Ahem, there are crowned heads and other heads—and—ahem—there are letters *with* crowns and letters *without* crowns.

STRÜBEL.

Letters—? Are you——?

ROSA.

There are maids of honour—and other maids! (*Giggles.*)

STRÜBEL.

Permit me. (*Tapping her forehead lightly with his finger.*) Ow! Ow!

ROSA.

What's the matter?

STRÜBEL.

Why, your head's on fire! Blow! Blow! And while you are getting some salve for my burns, I'll just— (*Goes to the telescope.*)

(*Enter* FRAU VON HALLDORF, LIDDY, *and* MILLY. FRAU VON HALLDORF *is an aristocratic woman, somewhat supercilious and affected.*)

LIDDY.

Here's the telescope, mother. Now you can see for yourself.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

What a pity that it's in use just now.

STRÜBEL (*stepping back*).

Oh, I beg of you, ladies—I have plenty of time. I can wait.

FRAU v. HALLDORF (*condescendingly*).

Ah, thanks so much. (*She goes up to the telescope, while* STRÜBEL *returns to his former place.*) Waitress! Bring us three glasses of milk.

LIDDY (*as* MILLY *languidly drops into a chair*).

Beyond to the right is the road, mother.

FRAU v. HALLDORF.

Oh, I have found the road, but I see no carriage—neither a royal carriage nor any other sort.

LIDDY.

Let me look.

FRAU v. HALLDORF.

Please do.

LIDDY.

It has disappeared now.

FRAU v. HALLDORF.

Are you quite sure that it was a royal carriage?

LIDDY.

Oh, one has an instinct for that sort of thing, mother. It comes to one in the cradle.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

(*As* MILLY *yawns and sighs aloud.*) Are you sleepy, dear?

MILLY.

No, only tired. I'm always tired.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

Well, that's just why we are at the Springs. Do as the princess does: take the waters religiously.

MILLY.

The princess oughtn't to be climbing up such a steep hill either on a hot day like this.

FRAU V. HALLDORF (*more softly*).

Well, you know why we are taking all this trouble. If, by good luck, we should happen to meet the princess——

LIDDY.

(*Who has been looking through the telescope.*) Oh, there it is again!

FRAU V. HALLDORF (*eagerly*).

Where? Where? (*Takes* LIDDY'S *place.*)

LIDDY.

It's just coming around the turn at the top.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

Oh, now I see it! Why, there's no one inside!

LIDDY.

Well, then she's coming up on foot.

FRAU V. HALLDORF (*to* MILLY).

See, the princess is coming up on foot, too. And she is just as anæmic as you are.

MILLY.

If I were going to marry a grand-duke, and if I could have my own carriage driven along beside me, I wouldn't complain of having to walk either.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

I can't see a thing now.

LIDDY.

You have to turn the screw, mother.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

I have been turning it right along, but the telescope won't move.

LIDDY.

Let me try.

STRÜBEL.

(*Who has been throwing little wads of paper at* ROSA *during the preceding conversation.*) What are they up to?

LIDDY.

It seems to me that you've turned the screw too far, mother.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

Well, what shall we do about it?

STRÜBEL (*rising*).

Permit me to come to your aid, ladies. I've had some experience with these old screws.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

Very kind—indeed. (STRÜBEL *busies himself with the instrument.*)

LIDDY.

Listen, mother. If the carriage has almost reached the top the princess can't be far off. Wouldn't it be best, then, to watch for them on the road?

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

Certainly, if you think that would be best, dear Liddy.

STRÜBEL.

This is not only an old screw, but it's a regular perverted old screw!

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

Ah, really?—(*Aside to her daughters.*) And if she should actually speak to us at this accidental meeting—and if we could present ourselves as the subjects of her noble fiancé, and tell her that we live at her future home—just imagine what an advantage that would give us over the other women of the court!

STRÜBEL.

There, ladies! We have now rescued the useful instrument to which the far-sightedness of mankind is indebted.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

Thanks, so much.—Pardon me, sir, but have you heard anything about the report that the princess is going to make the journey up here to-day?

STRÜBEL.

The princess? The Princess of the Springs? The Princess of the lonely villa? The Princess who is expected at the iron spring every morning, but who has never been seen by a living soul? Why, I am enormously interested. You wouldn't believe how much interested I am!

LIDDY (*who has looked out, back*).

There—there—there—it is!

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

The carriage?

LIDDY.

It's reached the top already. It is stopping over there at the edge of the woods.

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

She will surely enter it there, then. Come quickly, my dear children, so that it will look quite accidental.—Here is

your money. (*She throws a coin to* ROSA *and unwraps a small package done up in tissue paper which she has brought with her.*) Here is a bouquet for you—and here's one for you. You are to present these to the princess.

MILLY.

So that it will look quite accidental—oh, yes! (*All three go out.*)

STRÜBEL.

Good heavens! Could I—? I don't believe it! Surely she sits—Well, I'll make sure right away— (*Goes up to the telescope and stops.*) Oh, I'll go along with them, anyhow. (*Exit after them.*)

FRAU LINDEMANN (*entering*).

Have they all gone—all of them?

ROSA.

All of them.

FRAU LINDEMANN (*looking toward the right*).

There—there—two ladies and a lackey are coming up the footpath. Mercy me! How my heart is beating!—If I had only had the sofa re-covered last spring!—What am I going to say to them?—Rosa, don't you know a poem by heart which you could speak to the princess? (ROSA *shrugs her shoulders.*) They're coming through the court

now!—Stop putting your arms under your apron that way, you stupid thing!—oh dear, oh dear——

(*The door opens.* A LACKEY *in plain black livery enters, and remains standing at the door. He precedes* THE PRINCESS *and* FRAU VON BROOK. THE PRINCESS *is a pale, sickly, unassuming young girl, wearing a very simple walking costume and a medium-sized leghorn hat trimmed with roses.* FRAU VON BROOK *is a handsome, stately, stern-looking woman, in the thirties. She is well dressed, but in accordance with the simple tastes of the North German nobility.*)

FRAU V. BROOK.

Who is the proprietor of this place?

FRAU LINDEMANN.

At your command, your Highness.

FRAU V. BROOK (*reprovingly*).

I am the maid of honour.—Where is the room that has been ordered?

FRAU LINDEMANN (*opens the door, left*).

Here—at the head of the stairs—my lady.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Would your Highness care to remain here for a few moments?

THE PRINCESS.

Very much, dear Frau von Brook.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Edward, order what is needed for Her Highness and see that a room next to Her Highness is prepared for me. I may assume that these are your Highness's wishes?

THE PRINCESS.

Why certainly, dear Frau von Brook. (THE LACKEY, *who is carrying shawls and pillows, goes out with* ROSA, *left.*)

THE PRINCESS.

Mais puisque je te dis, Eugénie, que je n'ai pas sommeil. M'envoyer coucher comme une enfant, c'est abominable.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Mais je t'implore, chérie, sois sage! Tu sais, que c'est le médecin, qui——

THE PRINCESS.

Ah, ton médecin! Toujours cette corvée. Et si je te dis——

FRAU V. BROOK.

Chut! My dear woman, wouldn't it be best for you to superintend the preparations?

FRAU LINDEMANN.

I am entirely at your service. (*About to go out, left.*)

FRAU V. BROOK.

One thing more. This veranda, leading from the house to the grounds—would it be possible to close it to the public?

FRAU LINDEMANN.

Oh, certainly. The guests as often as not sit out under the trees.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Very well, then do so, please. (FRAU LINDEMANN *locks the door.*) We may be assured that no one will enter this place?

FRAU LINDEMANN.

If it is desired, none of us belonging to the house will come in here either.

FRAU V. BROOK.

We should like that.

FRAU LINDEMANN.

Very well. (*Exit.*)

FRAU V. BROOK.

Really, you must be more careful, darling. If that woman had understood French— You must be careful!

THE PRINCESS.

What would have been so dreadful about it?

FRAU V. BROOK.

Oh, my dear child! This mood of yours, which is due to nothing but your illness—that reminds me, you haven't taken your peptonised milk yet—this is a secret which we must keep from everyone, above all from your fiancé. If the Grand-Duke should discover——

THE PRINCESS (*shrugging her shoulders*).

Well, what of it?

FRAU V. BROOK.

A bride's duty is to be a happy bride. Otherwise——

THE PRINCESS.

Otherwise?

FRAU V. BROOK.

She will be a lonely and an unloved woman.

THE PRINCESS (*with a little smile of resignation*).

Ah!

FRAU V. BROOK.

What is it, dear? (THE PRINCESS *shakes her head.*) And then think of the strain of those formal presentations awaiting you in the autumn! You must grow strong. Remember that you must be equal to the most exacting demands of life.

THE PRINCESS.

Of life? Whose life?

FRAU V. BROOK.

What do you mean by that?

THE PRINCESS.

Ah, what good does it do to talk about it?

FRAU V. BROOK.

Yes, you are right. In my soul, too, there are unhappy and unholy thoughts that I would rather not utter. From my own experience I know that it is best to keep strictly within the narrow path of Duty.

THE PRINCESS.

And to go to sleep.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Ah, it isn't only that.

THE PRINCESS.

Look out there! See the woods!—Ah, to lie down on the moss, to cover oneself with leaves, to watch the clouds pass by high above——

FRAU V. BROOK (*softening*).

We can do that, too, sometime.

THE PRINCESS (*laughing aloud*).

Sometime!

(THE LACKEY *appears at the door*).

FRAU V. BROOK.

Is everything ready? (THE LACKEY *bows.*)

THE PRINCESS (*aside to* FRAU V. BROOK).

But I simply cannot sleep.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Try to, for my sake. (*Aloud.*) Does your Highness command——

THE PRINCESS (*smiling and sighing*).

Yes, I command. (*They go out, left.*)

(*The stage remains empty for several moments. Then* STRÜBEL *is heard trying the latch of the back door.*)

STRÜBEL'S VOICE.

Hullo! What's up! Why is this locked all of a sudden? Rosa!—Open up! I've got to look through the telescope! Rosa! Won't you?—Oh, well, I know how to help myself. (*He is seen walking outside of the glass-covered veranda. Then he puts his head through the open window at the right.*) Not a soul inside?— (*Climbs over.*) Well, here we are. What on earth has happened to these people? (*Unlocks the back door and looks out.*) Everything deserted. Well, it's all the same to me. (*Locks the door again.*) But let's find out right away what the carriage has to do with the case. (*Prepares to look through the telescope.*

THE PRINCESS *enters cautiously through the door at the left, her hat in her hand. Without noticing* STRÜBEL, *who is standing motionless before the telescope, she goes hurriedly to the door at the back and unlocks it.*)

STRÜBEL.

(*Startled at the sound of the key, turns around.*) Why, how do you do? (THE PRINCESS, *not venturing to move, glances back at the door through which she has entered.*) Wouldn't you like to look through the telescope a while? Please do. (THE PRINCESS, *undecided as to whether or not she should answer him, takes a few steps back toward the door at the left.*) Why are you going away? I won't do anything to you.

THE PRINCESS (*reassured*).

Oh, I'm not going away.

STRÜBEL.

That's right. But—where have you come from? The door was locked. Surely you didn't climb through the window as I did?

THE PRINCESS (*frightened*).

What?—You came—through the window?——

STRÜBEL.

Of course I did.

THE PRINCESS (*frightened anew*).

Then I had rather— (*About to go back.*)

STRÜBEL.

Oh, my dear young lady, you just stay right here. Why, before I'd drive you away I'd pitch myself headlong over a precipice!

THE PRINCESS (*smiling, reassured*).

I only wanted to go out into the woods for half an hour.

STRÜBEL.

Oh, then you're a regular guest here at the Inn?

THE PRINCESS (*quickly*).

Yes—yes, of course.

STRÜBEL.

And of course you drink the waters down below?

THE PRINCESS (*in a friendly way*).

Oh, yes, I drink the waters. And I'm taking the baths, too.

STRÜBEL.

Two hundred metres up and down every time! Isn't that very hard on you? Heavens! And you look so pale! See here, my dear young lady, don't you do it. It would be better for you to go down there—that is— Oh, forgive me! I've been talking without thinking. Of course, you

have your own reasons— It's decidedly cheaper up here. *I* know how to value a thing of that sort. I've never had any money in all my life!

THE PRINCESS (*trying to seem practical*).

But when one comes to a watering-place, one must have money.

STRÜBEL (*slapping himself on the chest*).

Do I look to you as if I drank iron? Thank Heaven, I can't afford such luxuries! No; I'm only a poor fellow who earns his miserable pittance during vacation by acting as a private tutor—that's to say, "miserable" is only a figure of speech, for in the morning I lie abed until nine, at noon I eat five, and at night seven, courses; and as for work, I really haven't a thing to do! My pupil is so anæmic—why, compared to him, *you're* fit for a circus rider!

THE PRINCESS (*laughing unrestrainedly*).

Oh, well, I'm rather glad I'm not one.

STRÜBEL.

Dear me, it's a business like any other.

THE PRINCESS.

Like any other? Really, I didn't think that.

STRÜBEL.

And pray, what did you think then?

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, I thought that they were—an entirely different sort of people.

STRÜBEL.

My dear young lady, all people are "an entirely different sort." Of course *we* two aren't. We get along real well together, don't we? As poor as church mice, both of us!

THE PRINCESS (*smiling reflectively*).

Who knows? Perhaps that's true.

STRÜBEL (*kindly*).

Do you know what? If you want to stay down there—I'll tell you how one can live cheaply. I have a friend, a student like myself. He's here to mend up as you are. I feed him up at the house where I'm staying. (*Frightened at a peculiar look of* THE PRINCESS's.) Oh, but you mustn't be— No, I shouldn't have said it. It wasn't decent of me. Only, let me tell you, I'm so glad to be able to help the poor fellow out of my unexpected earnings, that I'd like to be shouting it from the housetops all the time! Of course, you understand that, don't you?

THE PRINCESS.

You like to help people, then?

STRÜBEL.

Surely—don't you?

THE PRINCESS (*reflecting*).

No. There's always so much talk about it, and the whole thing immediately appears in the newspapers.

STRÜBEL.

What? If you help some one, that appears——?

THE PRINCESS (*quickly correcting herself*).

I only mean if one takes part in entertainments for charity——

STRÜBEL.

Oh, yes, naturally. In those things they always get some woman of rank to act as patroness, if they can, and she sees to it, you may be sure, that the newspapers make a fuss over it.

THE PRINCESS (*demurely*).

Oh, not every——

STRÜBEL.

Just try to teach me something I don't know about these titled women! Besides, my dear young lady, where is your home—in one of the large cities, or——?

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, no. In quite a small town—really more like the country.

STRÜBEL.

Then, I'm going to show you something that you probably never saw before in all your life.

THE PRINCESS.

Oh do! What is it?

STRÜBEL.

A princess! H'm—not a make-believe, but a real, true-blue princess!

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, really?

STRÜBEL.

Yes. Our Princess of the Springs.

THE PRINCESS.

And who may that be?

STRÜBEL.

Why, Princess Marie Louise.

THE PRINCESS.

Of Geldern?

STRÜBEL.

Of course.

THE PRINCESS.

Do you know her?

STRÜBEL.

Why, certainly.

THE PRINCESS.

Really? I thought that she lived in great retirement.

STRÜBEL.

Well, that doesn't do her any good. Not a bit of it. And because you are such a jolly, good fellow, I'm going to tell you my secret. I'm in love with this princess!

THE PRINCESS.

Oh!

STRÜBEL.

You can't imagine what a comfort it is. The fact is, every young poet has got to have a princess to love.

THE PRINCESS.

Are *you* a poet?

STRÜBEL.

Can't you tell that by looking at me?

THE PRINCESS.

I never saw a poet before.

STRÜBEL.

Never saw a poet—never saw a princess! Why, you're learning a heap of things to-day!

THE PRINCESS (*assenting*).

H'm—And have you written poems to her?

STRÜBEL.

Why, that goes without saying! Quantities of 'em!

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, please recite some little thing—won't you?

STRÜBEL.

No, not yet. Everything at the proper time.

THE PRINCESS.

Ah, yes, first I should like to see the princess.

STRÜBEL.

No, first I am going to tell you the whole story.

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, yes, yes. Please do. (*Sits down.*)

STRÜBEL.

Well, then—I had hardly heard that she was here before I was dead in love with her. It was just as quick as a shot, I tell you. Just as if I had waited all my life long to fall in love with her. Besides, I also heard about her beauty—and her sorrow. You see, she had an early love affair.

THE PRINCESS (*disconcerted*).

What? Are they saying that?

STRÜBEL.

Yes. It was a young officer who went to Africa because of her—and died there.

THE PRINCESS.

And they know that, too?

STRÜBEL.

What don't they know?—But that's a mere detail—it doesn't concern me. Even the fact that in six months she will become the bride of a grand-duke—even that can make no difference to me. For the present she is *my* princess.—But you're not listening to me!

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, yes I am!

STRÜBEL.

Do you know what that means—*my* princess? I'll not give up *my* princess—not for anything in all the world!

THE PRINCESS.

But—if you don't even know her——?

STRÜBEL.

I don't know her? Why, I know her as well as I know myself!

THE PRINCESS.

Have you ever met her, then?

STRÜBEL.

I don't know of any one who has ever met her. And there's not a soul that can tell what she looks like. It is said that there were pictures of her in the shop-windows

when she first came, but they were removed immediately. In the morning a great many people are always lurking around the Springs trying to catch a glimpse of her. I myself have gotten up at six o'clock a couple of times—on the same errand—and if you knew me better, you'd realise what that meant. But not a sign of her! Either she has the stuff brought to her house, or she has the power of making herself invisible. (THE PRINCESS *turns aside to conceal a smile.*) After that, I used to hang around her garden—every day, for hours at a time. Until one day the policeman, whom the managers of the Springs have stationed at the gates, came up to me and asked me what on earth I was doing there. Well, that was the end of those methods of approach! Suddenly, however, a happy thought struck me. Now I can see her, and have her near to me as often as I wish.

THE PRINCESS.

Why, that's very interesting. How?

STRÜBEL.

Yes, that's just the point. H'm, should I risk it? Should I take you into my confidence?

THE PRINCESS.

You promised me some time ago that you would show her to me.

STRÜBEL.

Wait a second. (*Looks through the telescope.*) There she is. Please look for yourself.

THE PRINCESS.

But I am— (*She, too, looks through the telescope.*) Actually, there is the garden as plain as if one were in it.

STRÜBEL.

And at the corner window on the left—with the embroidery-frame—that's she.

THE PRINCESS.

Are you absolutely certain that that is the princess?

STRÜBEL.

Why, who else could it be?

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, 'round about a princess like that—there are such a lot of people. For instance, there is her waiting-woman, there's the seamstress and her assistants, there's——

STRÜBEL.

But my dear young lady, if you only understood anything about these matters, you would have been certain at the very first glance that it was she—and no one else. Observe the nobility in every motion—the queenly grace with which she bends over the embroidery-frame——

THE PRINCESS.

How do you know that it's an embroidery-frame?

STRÜBEL.

Why, what should a princess be bending over if not an embroidery-frame? Do you expect her to be darning stockings?

THE PRINCESS.

It wouldn't hurt her at all!

STRÜBEL.

Now, that's just one of those petty, bourgeois notions which we ought to suppress. It's not enough that *we* have to stick in this misery, but we'd like to drag her down, too—that being far above all earthly care——

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, dear me!

STRÜBEL.

What are you sighing about so terribly?

THE PRINCESS

Tell me, wouldn't you like to have a closer acquaintance with your princess, sometime?

STRÜBEL.

Closer? Why should I?—Isn't she close enough to me, my far-away princess?—for that's what I call her when I talk to myself about her. And to have her *still* closer?

THE PRINCESS.

Why, so that you could talk to her and know what she really was like.

STRÜBEL (*terrified*).

Talk to her! Heaven forbid! Goodness gracious, no! Just see here—how am I to face a princess? I'm an ordinary fellow, the son of poor folks. I haven't polished manners—I haven't even a decent tailor. A lady like that—why, she'd measure me from top to toe in one glance.—I've had my lessons in the fine houses where I've applied as tutor. A glance from boots to cravat—and you're dismissed!

THE PRINCESS.

And you think that I—(*correcting herself*)—that this girl is as superficial as that?

STRÜBEL.

"This girl"! Dear me, how that sounds! But, how should I ever succeed in showing her my real self? And even if I should, what would she care?—Oh, yes, if she were like you—so nice and simple—and with such a kind-hearted, roguish little twinkle in her eye——!

THE PRINCESS.

Roguish—I? Why so?

STRÜBEL.

Because you are laughing at me in your sleeve. And really I deserve nothing better.

THE PRINCESS.

But your princess deserves something better than your opinion of her.

STRÜBEL.

How do you know that?

THE PRINCESS.

You really ought to try to become acquainted with her sometime.

STRÜBEL.

No, no, no—and again no! As long as she remains my far-away princess, she is everything that I want her to be—modest, gracious, loving. She smiles upon me dreamily. Yes, she even listens when I recite my poems to her—and that can't be said of many people! And as soon as I have finished, she sighs, takes a rose from her breast, and casts it down to the poet.—I wrote a few verses yesterday about that rose, that flower which represents the pinnacle of my desires, as it were.

THE PRINCESS (*eagerly*).

Oh, yes. Oh, please, please!

STRÜBEL.

Well, then, here goes. H'm—"Twenty roses nestling close——"

THE PRINCESS.

What? Are there twenty now?

STRÜBEL (*severely*).

My princess would not have interrupted me.

THE PRINCESS.

Oh please—forgive me.

STRÜBEL.

I shall begin again.

Twenty roses nestling close
Gleam upon thy breast,
Twenty years of rose-red love
Upon thy fair cheeks rest.

Twenty years would I gladly give
Out of life's brief reign,
Could I but ask a rose of thee
And ask it not in vain.

Twenty roses thou dost not need
—Why, pearls and rubies are thine!—
With nineteen thou'dst be just as fair,
And *one* would then be *mine!*

And twenty years of rose-wreathed joy
Would spring to life for me—
Yet twenty years could ne'er suffice
To worship it—and thee!

THE PRINCESS.

How nice that is! I've never had any verses written to me b——

STRÜBEL.

Ah, my dear young lady, ordinary folks like us have to do their own verse-making!

THE PRINCESS.

And all for one rose!—Dear me, how soon it fades! And then what is left you?

STRÜBEL.

No, my dear friend, a rose like that never fades—even as my love for the gracious giver can never die.

THE PRINCESS.

But you haven't even got it yet!

STRÜBEL.

That makes no difference in the end. I'm entirely independent of such externals. When some day I shall be explaining Ovid to the beginners, or perhaps even reading Horace with the more advanced classes—no, it's better for

the present not to think of reaching any such dizzy heights of greatness—well, then I shall always be saying to myself with a smile of satisfaction, "You, too, were one of those confounded artist fellows—why, you once went so far as to love a princess!"

THE PRINCESS.

And that will make you happy?

STRÜBEL.

Enormously!—For what makes us happy after all? A bit of happiness? Great heavens, no! Happiness wears out like an old glove.

THE PRINCESS.

Well, then, what does?

STRÜBEL.

Ah, how should I know! Any kind of a dream—a fancy—a wish unfulfilled—a sorrow that we coddle—some nothing which suddenly becomes everything to us. I shall always say to my pupils—"Young men, if you want to be happy as long as you live, create gods for yourselves in your own image; these gods will take care of your happiness."

THE PRINCESS.

And what would the god be like that you would create?

STRÜBEL.

Would be? *Is*, my dear young lady, *is!*—A man of the world, a gentleman, well bred, smiling, enjoying life—who looks out upon mankind from under bushy eyebrows, who knows Nietzsche and Stendhal by heart, and—(*pointing to his shoes*) who isn't down at the heels—a god, in short, worthy of my princess. I know perfectly well that all my life long I shall never do anything but crawl around on the ground like an industrious ant, but I know, too, that the god of my fancy will always take me by the collar when the proper moment comes and pull me up again into the clouds. Yes, up there I'm safe.—And your god, or rather your goddess—what would she look like?

THE PRINCESS (*thoughtfully*).

That's not easy to say. My goddess would be—a quiet, peaceful woman who would treasure a secret, little joy like the apple of her eye, who would know nothing of the world except what she wanted to know, and who would have the strength to make her own choice when it pleased her.

STRÜBEL.

But that doesn't seem to me a particularly lofty aspiration, my dear young lady.

THE PRINCESS.

Lofty as the heavens, my friend.

STRÜBEL.

My princess would be of a different opinion.

THE PRINCESS.

Do you think so?

STRÜBEL.

For that's merely the ideal of every little country girl.

THE PRINCESS.

Not her ideal—her daily life which she counts as naught. It is my ideal because I can never attain it.

STRÜBEL.

Oh, I say, my dear young girl! It can't be as bad as that! A young girl like you—so charming and—I don't want to be forward, but if I could only help you a bit!

THE PRINCESS.

Have you got to be helping all the time? Before, it was only a cheap lunch, now it's actually——

STRÜBEL.

Yes, yes, I'm an awful donkey, I know, but——

THE PRINCESS (*smiling*).

Don't say any more about it, dear friend! I like you that way.

STRÜBEL (*feeling oppressed by her superiority*).

Really you are an awfully strange person! There's something about you that—that——

THE PRINCESS.

Well?

STRÜBEL.

I can't exactly define it.—Tell me, weren't you wanting to go into the woods before? It's so—so oppressive in here.

THE PRINCESS.

Oppressive? I don't find it so at all—quite the contrary.

STRÜBEL.

No, no—I'm restless. I don't know what—at all events, may I not escort you—? One can chat more freely, one can express himself more openly—if one— (*Takes a deep breath.*)

THE PRINCESS (*smiling*).

And you are leaving your far-away princess with such a light heart?

STRÜBEL (*carelessly*).

Oh, she! She won't run away. She'll be sitting there tomorrow again—and the day after, too!

THE PRINCESS.

And so that is your great, undying love?

STRÜBEL.

Yes, but when a girl like you comes across one's path——

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

(*Hurrying in and then drawing back in feigned astonishment.*) Oh!

LIDDY *and* MILLY (*similarly*).

Oh!

STRÜBEL.

Well, ladies, didn't I tell you that you wouldn't find her? Princesses don't grow along the roadside like weeds!

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

(*Disregarding him—ceremoniously.*) The infinite happiness with which this glorious event fills our hearts must excuse in some measure the extraordinary breach of good manners which we are committing in daring to address your Highness. But, as the fortunate subjects of your Highness's most noble fiancé, we could not refrain from——

STRÜBEL.

Well, well! What's all this?

FRAU V. HALLDORF.

—from offering to our eagerly awaited sovereign a slight token of our future loyalty. Liddy! Milly! (LIDDY *and* MILLY *come forward, and, with low court bows, offer*

their bouquets.) My daughters respectfully present these few flowers to the illustrious princess——

STRÜBEL.

I beg your pardon, but who is doing the joking here, you or——?

(FRAU V. BROOK *enters.* THE PRINCESS, *taken unawares, has retreated more and more helplessly toward the door at the left, undecided whether to take flight or remain. She greets the arrival of* FRAU V. BROOK *with a happy sigh of relief.*)

FRAU V. BROOK (*severely*).

Pardon me, ladies. Apparently you have not taken the proper steps toward being presented to Her Highness. In matters of this sort one must first apply to me. I may be addressed every morning from eleven to twelve, and I shall be happy to consider your desires.

FRAU V. HALLDORF (*with dignity*).

I and my children, madame, were aware of the fact that we were acting contrary to the usual procedure; but the impulse of loyal hearts is guided by no rule. I shall be glad to avail myself of your—very kind invitation.

(*All three go out with low curtsies to* THE PRINCESS.)

FRAU V. BROOK.

What forwardness!—But how could you come down without me?—And what is that young man over there doing? Does he belong to those people?

(THE PRINCESS *shakes her head.* STRÜBEL, *without a word, goes to get his hat which has been lying on a chair, bows abruptly, and is about to leave.*)

THE PRINCESS.

Oh, no! That wouldn't be nice. Not that way——

FRAU V. BROOK (*amazed*).

What?—What!—Why, your Highness——!

THE PRINCESS.

Let me be, Eugenie. This young man and I have become far too good friends to part in such an unfriendly, yes, almost hostile, fashion.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Your Highness, I am *very* much——

THE PRINCESS (*to* STRÜBEL).

You and I will certainly remember this hour with great pleasure, and I thank you for it with all my heart. If I only had a rose with me so as to give you your dear wish! —Eugenie, haven't we any roses with us?

FRAU V. BROOK.

Your Highness, I am *very* much——

THE PRINCESS.

(*Examining herself and searching among the vases.*) Well, how are we going to manage it?

STRÜBEL.

I most humbly thank—your Highness—for the kind intention.

THE PRINCESS.

No, no—wait! (*Her glance falls upon the hat which she is holding in her hand—with a sudden thought.*) I have it!—But don't think that I'm joking.—And we'll have to do without scissors! (*She tears one of the roses from the hat.*) I don't know whether there are just twenty—(*Holding out one of the roses to him.*) Well?—This rose has the merit of being just as real as the sentiment of which we were speaking before—and just as unfading.

STRÜBEL.

Is this—to be—my punishment? (THE PRINCESS *smilingly shakes her head.*) Or does your Highness mean by it that only the Unreal never fades?

THE PRINCESS.

That's exactly what I mean—because the Unreal must always dwell in the imagination.

STRÜBEL.

So that's it! Just as it is only the *far-away* princesses who are always near to us.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Permit me to remark, your Highness—that it is *high* time——

THE PRINCESS.

As you see, those who are near must hurry away. (*Offering him the rose again.*) Well?

STRÜBEL.

(*Is about to take it, but lets his hand fall.*) With the far-away princess there—(*pointing down*)—it would have been in harmony, but with the— (*Shakes his head, then softly and with emotion.*) No, thanks—I'd rather not. (*He bows and goes out.*)

THE PRINCESS.

(*Smiling pensively, throws away the artificial flower.*) I'm going to ask my fiancé to let me send him a rose.

FRAU V. BROOK.

Your Highness, I am *very* much—surprised!

THE PRINCESS.

Well, I told you that I wasn't sleepy.

CURTAIN.